COMPLETE QUICK-TRIGGER STORIES
NOW 10¢
POPULAR
JAN.
WESTERN
A THRILLING PUBLICATION
BUY WAR BONDS AND STAMPS FOR VICTORY!
FEATURING
PRAIRIE WOLF
A Quick-Trigger Novelet
By JOHNSTON McCULLEY
SIX-GUN DOUBLE TALK
A Painted Post Novelet
By TOM GUNN
THE LONE LAWMAN
An Action Novelet
By DOUGLAS BICKLE

# Here's the Greatest BILLFOLD BARGAIN in all America

## Your LODGE Emblem or ARMY or NAVY Insignia and Name Engraved in 23K. Gold Absolutely FREE

**Special Introductory Offer**

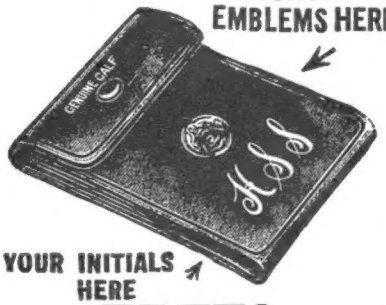
**$1.98**

***Rising Costs of Leather May Make It Impossible To Repeat This Amazing Offer!***

**Genuine Highest Quality Leather BLACK CALFSKIN De Luxe VALUE**

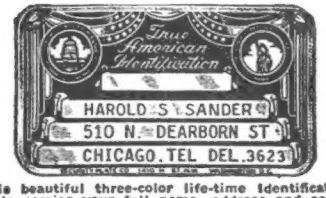
## Your FAVORITE Emblem, NAME, ADDRESS, and Social Security Number Engraved in GOLD—FREE!

**YOUR CHOICE OF EMBLEMS HERE**




**YOUR INITIALS HERE**

**FREE!**




This beautiful three-color life-time Identification Plate carries your full name, address and social security or draft number.

**Also FREE**—If you order at once we send you this beautiful Identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, hand engraved with your name, address, city and state. Will last a lifetime.

Men:—Here, without a doubt, is positively the greatest Billfold and Pass Case Bargain that you'll be likely to see for a good many years to come. For a high quality Calfskin Billfold, beautifully engraved in gold, with your LODGE Emblem or Army or Navy Insignia and Name, you would expect to pay up to $4.50 and consider it a marvelous buy. If you take advantage of this sensational introductory offer, you can get this superb genuine Calfskin Wallet and Pass Case for only $1.98, and we will send you absolutely free a specially designed three color lifetime Identification Plate, which carries your Social Security Number, your Name and Address or your Army Draft Number. This fine grain calfskin Billfold must actually be seen to be fully appreciated. Besides the spacious compartment at the back which can be used for currency, checks, papers, etc., it has four pockets each protected by celluloid to prevent the soiling of your valuable membership and credit cards.

When closed, this handsome Billfold has the soft velvety feel you find only in quality Calfskin. Your choice of Emblems and Initials, are beautifully embossed in 23 karat gold on the face of the Billfold. Due to difficulty in obtaining choice leather because of war conditions, the supply of these Billfolds is limited. Remember if you send your order promptly, we will include absolutely FREE, a beautiful identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, all hand engraved with your Name, Address, City and State. If after receiving your Billfold and Free Gift, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you have ever come across, return them to us and your money will be cheerfully refunded in full. Send your order today, without fail so you won't be disappointed.

## Rush This Coupon For This Once-In-A-Lifetime Bargain!

**IMPORTANT!** This Triple combination Billfold makes one of the most handsome and appreciated gifts you could possibly give to any man! If you have a boy or a friend serving his country, surprise him with this hand engraved calfskin billfold, as a gift. Send your order today!

**ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART,**
**Dept. 266-C, 54 W. Illinois St., Chicago,**_____

If you want a LODGE, ARMY, NAVY, MARINE or AIR CORPS INSIGNIA, state name here Gentlemen: I enclose $1.98. Please send me a Genuine Calfskin Billfold with my name and choice of Emblems engraved in 23k gold. Include absolutely free, a life-time Identification Plate carrying my full Name and Social Security Number, or Draft Number. Also include FREE an Identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, all hand-engraved with my Name, Address, City and State.

My Full Name. .... ..... ..... .... .. .....
(Please print clearly)

Address .. ... .. .. .. .. .. .. ... ... .....

City. .. .... .. .. ... .. State.. .. ..... ...

Social Security Number.... ..... ....Army Draft Number... .. .. .....

☐ Check here if you want us to ship C.O.D. for $1.98 plus a few pennies postage and C.O.D. charges.

# Think of It! Our Graduates Run 43% of ALL the Identification Bureaus in America!

## Here's a Partial List of City and State Institutions In Which Our Graduates Were Placed As FINGER PRINT EXPERTS

**Arrest Him, Officer!**
**I'll have complete facts on the other fellow tonight!**

**Send for complete list of over 840 bureaus where our graduates are placed. THEN write the nearest bureau and learn what our graduates think of us.**

State Bureau of Massachusetts
State Bureau of Illinois
State Bureau of Iowa
State Bureau of Idaho
State Bureau of Colorado
State Bureau of Washington
State Bureau of Michigan
State Bureau of Utah
State Bureau of Ohio
Pittsburg, Calif.
Kokomo, Ind.
El Reno, Okla.
Boston, Mass.
Mexico City, Mex.
Parsons, Kans.
Tallahassee, Fla.
Columbia, S. C.
Hull, Que., Can.
Portsmouth, Ohio
Selma, Ala.
Atchison, Kans.
Hot Springs, S. D.
Glens Falls, N. Y.
Billings, Mont.
Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.
Laconia, N. H.
Salem, N. J.
Cedar Rapids, Ia.
London, Ohio
Elgin, Ill.
Miami Beach, Fla.
Asheville, N. C.
Ft. Scott, Kans.
Augusta, Ga.
Florence, S. C.
Hinsdale, Ill.
New Bedford, Mass.
Neosho, Mo.
Sapulpa, Okla.
New York, N. Y.
Lufkin, Texas
Tijuana, Mex.
Berlin, N. H.
Greenville, S. C.
Havana, Cuba
Seattle, Wash.
Meridian, Miss.
Dodge City, Kans.
Danville, Va.
Easton, Pa.
Syracuse, N. Y.
El Centro, Calif.
Tampa, Fla.
Gadsden, Ala.
Decatur, Ga.
Anderson, Ind.
Massillon, Ohio
Waltham, Mass.
Grand Forks, S. D.
Bremerton, Wash.
Long Beach, Cal.
Ft. Worth, Tex.
Nunda, N. Y.
St. Louis, Mo.
Lansing, Mich.
Salisbury, N. C.
Elyria, Ohio
Carson City, Nev.
Burlington, Iowa
West Chicago, Ill.
Amarillo, Texas
Winfield, Kans.
Cambridge, Ohio
South Orange, N. J.
Savannah, Ga.
Omaha, Neb.
Paterson, N. J.
Beverly, Mass.
Canon City, Colo.
St. Cloud, Minn.
Franklin, Mass.
San Juan, P. R.
Henderson, N. C.
Erie, Pa.
Pecos, Texas
Orangeburg, S. C.
Berkeley, Calif.
Lancaster, Ohio
Mingo Jct., Ohio
Okmulgee, Okla.
Hazleton, Pa.
Yakima, Wash.
Oklahoma City, Okla.
Des Moines, Iowa
E. Lansing, Mich.
Globe, Ariz.
Hamtramck, Mich.
London, Ont., Can.
Compton, Calif.
Trenton, N. J.
Buena Vista, Colo.
Gainesville, Tex.
Elma, Iowa
Chillicothe, O.
Detroit, Mich.
Great Bend, Kans.
Kulangsu, Amoy, China
El Paso, Texas
Everett, Wash.
Schenectady, N. Y.
Alhambra, Calif.
Livingston, Mont.
Saginaw, Mich.
Wilkes-Barre, Pa.
Scranton, Pa.
Mobile, Ala.
Lincoln, Neb.
Seattle, Wash.
Ferndale, Mich.
McAlester, Okla.
Negaunee, Mich.
Lawton, Okla.
Crown Point, Ind.
Bay City, Mich.
Roanoke, Va.
Chatham, Ont., Can.
Glendale, Calif.
Joplin, Mo.
Lima, Ohio
Selma, N. C.
Stillwater, Okla.
Drumright, Okla.
Victoria, B. C., Can.
Baton Rouge, La.
Hawaiian Islands
Parkersburg, W. Va.
Mobile, Ala.
Huntsville, Tex.
New Iberia, La.
Sheridan, Wyo.
Ada, Okla.
Pontiac, Mich.
Granite, Okla.
Wichita Falls, Texas
Boise, Idaho
Miami, Fla.
Bartlesville, Okla.
Orlando, Fla.
Aberdeen, S. D.
York, Pa.
Little Rock, Ark.
St. Paul, Minn.
Pittsburgh, Pa.
Walla Walla, Wash.
Lincoln, Neb.
Birmingham, Ala.
Columbus, Ohio
Havana, Cuba
New Haven, Conn.
Great Falls, Mont.
Galveston, Tex.
Houston, Tex.
Waterloo, Iowa

## Want a Regular Monthly Salary?

### Be a Secret Service and Identification Expert!

Enjoy all the thrill of getting your man! — with no personal danger — PLUS a regular monthly paid salary and the opportunity to share in Rewards. Become a well paid Finger Print and Crime Detection Expert. Learn at home — in your spare time — and at low cost — the unique secrets of this young, fascinating and fast growing profession. We offer you the same course of training as we gave the hundreds of our graduates who now hold splendid positions in the more than 840 institutions partially listed on this page. Each of these bureaus has numerous graduates of ours on regular monthly salaries — and new openings develop from time to time.

**Wonderful Opportunity for TRAINED MEN in This Young, Fast Growing Profession**

Of the many thousands of cities in America, more than three-fourths are STILL without identification bureaus and many more are bound to come! That spells OPPORTUNITY! But you must be READY for it! You can easily master this profession that combines thrills with personal safety AND the security of a steady income! We show you HOW — just as we have already shown the hundreds who now hold good pay positions.

**FREE!** THE CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS NO. 38 MADE TO HIS CHIEF

Rush coupon for YOUR free copy of these reports! Follow Operator No. 38 on his exciting hunt for a murderous gang of counterfeiters. BETTER than Fiction, because every word is TRUE. ALSO, get free, "The Blue Book of Crime," showing the wonderful opportunities in the field of Finger Prints and Crime Detection. Take TODAY your first step toward a steady income and success. Mail the coupon AT ONCE.

**INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE**
**1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7961, Chicago, Ill.**

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7961, Chicago.

Gentlemen: Without any obligation on my part whatever, send me the Confidential Reports of Operator No. 38, also illustrated "Blue Book of Crime," complete list of bureaus employing your graduates, together with your low prices and Easy Terms offer. (Literature will be sent ONLY to persons stating their age.)

Name .....

Address .....

..... Age.....

• EVERY STORY BRAND NEW •

# POPULAR WESTERN

Vol. XIV, No. 1 CONTENTS January, 1943

**Featured Complete Novelet**

## PRAIRIE WOLF

### By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

*When Lem Bruce, railroad scout, uncovers a murderous sidewinder plot to block homesteading, he earns his kudos in a six-gun showdown against odds!* 24

**Other Full-Length Novelets**

THE LONE LAWMAN . . . . . Douglas Bickle 42
*Sheriff Brady Kildaine faces grim problems when he tackles the tough task of bringing his own brand of law to Tres Pasos!*

SIX-GUN DOUBLE TALK . . . . . Tom Gunn 74
*Painted Post is in the soup when Chow Now leaves the kitchen for the owlhoot—until Sheriff Steele and Deputy Watts serve justice piping hot!*

**Quick-Trigger Short Stories**

TOMAHAWK TRAIL . . . . . Scott Carleton 15
*Buffalo Billy Bates combats savage Arapahoe Indians*

HAM FIGHTS FIRE WITH FIRE . . . . . Alfred L. Garry 61
*The deputy of Sweetgrass singes the bankrolls of the Buckstrappers*

GUNS OF THE STORM . . . . . Gunnison Steele 89
*Ranny McCabe rides boldly into a showdown with a framing sidewinder*

RED-HEADED FOR TROUBLE . . . . . Gibson Scott Fox 97
*Red couldn't watch a crooked deal without taking a hand*

**and**

THE HOME CORRAL . . . . . Old Doc Trail 6

*Join THE POPULAR WESTERN CLUB! Coupon on Page* 112

POPULAR WESTERN, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues) $1.20; single copies, $.10. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter March 21, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1942, by Better Publications, Inc. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. 175

Read our companion magazines: Thrilling Western, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Thrilling Adventures, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Love, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Football, Popular Detective, Popular Love, Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Football, Texas Rangers, G-Men Detective, Air War, West, The American Eagle, Sky Fighters, The Phantom Detective, Detective Novels Magazine, Everyday Astrology, Masked Rider Western, Range Riders Western, The Rio Kid Western, Black Book Detective, The Masked Detective, Captain Future, Startling Stories, R A F Aces, Popular Crossword Puzzles, Best Crossword Puzzles, Rodeo Romances, Army Navy Flying Stories, Exciting Navy Stories, Exciting Love, Exciting Sports, Exciting Mystery, Exciting Detective, and Exciting Western.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

J. E. SMITH
President
National Radio Institute
Established 27 Years

# I WILL SEND A SAMPLE LESSON FREE

## to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

## I Trained These Men

**$200 A MONTH IN OWN BUSINESS**

"For several years I have been in business for myself making around $200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field." ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

**$5 to $10 WEEK IN SPARE TIME**

"I am engaged in spare time Radio work. I average from $5 to $10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner. All this extra money sure does come in handy." THEODORE K. DuBREE, Hersham, Pa.

**LIEUTENANT IN SIGNAL CORPS**

"I cannot divulge any information as to my type of work, but I can say that N. R. I. training is coming in mighty handy these days. (Name and address omitted for military reasons.)

**ACT NOW! MORE MAKING $30, $40, $50 A WEEK THAN EVER BEFORE**

FREE—if you mail the Coupon—this valuable lesson from my Radio Course, **plus** my 64-page illustrated Book, RICH REWARDS IN RADIO. A real introduction to the wonders and opportunities of Radio!

You'll see how my complete, practical Lessons offer **a quick way to more pay.** But even if you never go any farther, this sample Lesson is worth having. I will send it to you **without obligation.** MAIL THE COUPON!

**BEGINNERS QUICKLY LEARN TO EARN $5, $10 A WEEK IN SPARE TIME**

The moment you start my Course, I start sending you EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that show how to earn extra money fixing Radios. Many make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time while still learning. I send you SIX big kits of real Radio parts. You LEARN Radio fundamentals from my Lessons—PRACTICE what you learn by building typical circuits like those illustrated on this page—PROVE what you learn by interesting tests on circuits you build.

**BIG DEMAND NOW FOR TRAINED RADIO TECHNICIANS, OPERATORS**

The Radio repair business is booming because no new Radios are being made. Radio manufacturers are busy filling Government orders for wartime Radio Equipment. Radio Broadcasting Stations, Police, Aviation Radio and Loud Speaker Systems give good jobs to many. Civilian Radio Operators and Technicians are needed in large numbers by the Government. The N. R. I. Course has led to good jobs in ALL these branches of Radio.

**FIND OUT HOW I TRAIN YOU AT HOME FOR A GOOD JOB IN RADIO**

MAIL THE COUPON. I'll send you the FREE Lesson and my big, interesting book. They'll tell you about my Course, how I train you, what others have done, the types of jobs which are open to Radio Technicians. You'll read letters from more than 100 men I trained. You'll see what Radio offers YOU. And you'll have my FREE Lesson to keep, **without obligation.** No salesman will call. Mail the Coupon NOW—get started today on the road to bigger pay!

**J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute**
**Dept. 3A09, Washington, D. C.**

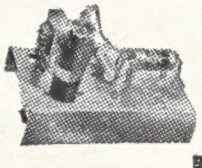
***TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS***

### You Build These And Many Other Radio Circuits With Kits I Supply!

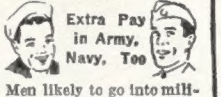
By the time you've conducted 60 sets of experiments with Radio Parts I supply—have made hundreds of measurements and adjustments—you'll have valuable, PRACTICAL experience.

You build this SUPER HETERODYNE CIRCUIT containing a preselector, oscillator-mixer-first detector, i.f. stage, diode-detector, a.v.c stage and audio stage. It will bring in local and distant stations on your own set. Get the thrill of learning at home evenings and spare time while you put the set through fascinating tests!

You make this MEASURING INSTRUMENT yourself early in the Course, useful for practical Radio work on neighborhood Radios to pick up EXTRA spare time money. It is a vacuum tube voltmeter and multimeter, measures A.C., D.C. and R.F. volts, D.C. currents, Resistance, Receiver Output.



Building this A. M. SIGNAL-GENERATOR will give you valuable experience. Provides amplitude-modulated signals for test and experimental purposes.



**Extra Pay in Army, Navy, Too**

Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties, much higher pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. Hundreds of service men now enrolled.

## GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

**Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 3A09**
**NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D. C.**

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name ..... Age.....

Address .....

City ..... State.....2FR

Missing Page

# They Never Knew It Was SO EASY To Play

## *Thousands Learn Musical Instruments By Amazingly Simple Method*

### No Teacher, No Musical Knowledge Required. In a Short Time You Start Playing Real Tunes! 700,000 Now Enrolled

THINK of the fun YOU are missing! The popularity, friendship, good times! Why? Because you think it's *hard* to learn music. You have an idea that it's a slow, tedious task, with lots of boring drills and exercises.

That's not the twentieth-century way! Surely you've heard the news! How people all over the world have learned to play by a method so simple a child can understand it—so fascinating that it's like playing a game. Imagine! You learn without a teacher—in your spare time at home—at a cost of only a few cents a day! You learn by the famous print-and-picture method—every position, every move before your eyes in big, clear illustrations. You CAN'T go wrong! And best of all, you start playing real tunes almost at once, from the very first lesson.

No needless, old-fashioned "scales" and exercises. No confused, perplexing study. You learn to play by playing. It's thrilling, exciting, inspiring! No wonder hundreds of thousands of people have taken up music this easy way. No wonder enthusiastic letters like those reproduced here pour in from all over the world.

Sound interesting? Well, just name the instrument you'd like to play and we'll prove you CAN! If interested, mail the coupon or write.

**U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC**
**2941 Brunswick Bldg.,**
**New York City**

**"Thar's Gold in Them Thar Hillbilly Songs."** Craze for mountain music, "swing" and other popular forms has brought fame and fortune to many who started playing for the fun of it. Thousands have discovered unexpected pleasure and profit in music, thanks to the unique method that makes it amazingly easy to learn.

**Learned Quickly at Home.** I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time. *H. C. S., Calif.

### Send for FREE Booklet and Print and Picture Sample

See for yourself how this wonderful self-instruction method works. Sit down, in the privacy of your own home, with the interesting illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home." No salesman will call—decide for yourself whether you want to play this easy way. (Instruments supplied at discount when wanted, cash or credit.)

**Invited to Parties.** Before I took your course I didn't know one note of music. Three months later I started to play for dances. I've been invited to many parties. *R. M., Vancouver, B. C.

**Course Is Bargain.** It is beyond belief what benefits I have derived from your course that you sent me at such a bargain. *W. R., Cusick, Washington.

**Surprised Friends.** People who hear me play don't understand how I do it. They ask if I haven't had lessons from a teacher. To their surprise they find I haven't. I'm glad to be a student of your School. *M. H., Athol, Kans.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional models*

**U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC**
**2941 Brunswick Bldg., New York City, N. Y.**

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument indicated below. Please send me your free booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home" and the free Print & Picture Sample.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Piano | Tenor Banjo | Trombone |
| Violin | Mandolin | Flute |
| Guitar | Ukulele | Piccolo |
| Piano Accordion | Cornet | Organ |
| Saxophone | Trumpet | Drums and Traps |
| Hawaiian Guitar | Harp | |

Have You
Name..... This Instru.?.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

**Note:** If you are under 16 yrs. of age, parent must sign coupon.

SAVE 2¢—Stick coupon on penny postcard.

# THE HOME CORRAL

*(Continued from page 6)*

the Mogollon Rim. That was the deadline that bounded their leisurely Paradise. The Mogollons are a steep, rugged rampart bounding the Tonto Basin on the south, cutting it off from the desert country.

According to the records, the Tewksburys saw a chance for revenge. They hated sheep but they hated their onetime friends, the Grahams, worse. So they made the deal. Tonto cowpunchers were plumb shocked and amazed one day to see a gray mass of baa-baas coming up over the Mogollon Rim, escorted by the Tewksburys, who all were frontier-toughened men and crack shots.

The cattlemen went to work. They drove the sheep out, that spring of 1887. A Navajo herder was killed by the raiding Graham faction.

*Fighting Hombres*

Nothing serious come of that right away. But come fall, the Daggs sheep, such as hadn't been killed off by the Graham raiders, topped the Mogollons again. This time the Tewksburys had a hard bunch of well-armed hombres with them.

They met the Graham outfit at the cabin of a settler named Middleton. Some harsh talk passed. It was generally claimed that old Jim Tewksbury started the shooting with his Winchester carbine, and that he did most of the shooting.


**HERE IT IS!**

*America's Best Dime's Worth of Picture Entertainment*

**NOW ON SALE AT ALL STANDS**


In something like ten seconds five of eight Graham riders had bullet holes in them. One, Tom Tucker, a footloose cowboy and famed gunhand, was shot through the lung. It was thought that he died—until he turned up years later as a undersheriff at Santa Fe.

But some others did die on the spot. Armed with ten warrants, Sheriff Bill Mulvenon rode down from Prescott with a posse of 30 men.

By now every man in Tonto Basin was forced to take sides. The issue was clean-cut. The Grahams were the cattle crowd. The Tewksburys were the sheep crowd.

Sheriff Mulvenon was a long while in the Tonto country and came out empty-handed. The story got out that the Tewksburys had rustled the posse's horses!

Anyhow, the Tewksburys had taken to the hills. Grahams were being bushwhacked. The youngest Graham was ambushed on a lonely trail. The two factions spent most of their days hunting for or else dodging each other.

*Showdown Time*

Finally they met. It was at the Tewksbury Ranch, where the Graham bunch got their enemies holed up in a cabin.

Several men were dropped when the foray started, in front of the cabin. As the affair turned into a siege, they laid there, neither side willing to call truce.

As the day wore on, the scent of blood attracted a band of half-wild Tewksbury hogs. Now comes the barbaric and horrible episode of those hogs rooting and ripping up the bodies of the dead men, there in the open in front of the cabin.

Presently the wife of John Tewksbury could stand it no longer. With a scream she rushed out with a shovel, scattered the hogs, and hastily buried the gun victims in shallow-scooped graves.

*Pioneer Woman's Courage*

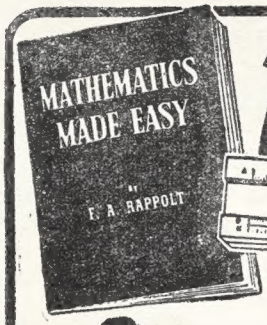
It was an example of courage of a frontier woman. And it was a tribute to the gallantry of the attackers that she returned to the cabin, weeping but unharmed.

That hog business sort of slowed up proceeding for a spell. In that interval, a helltooter named Andy Cooper showed up in Holbrook, a cowtown to the north, boasting of two Pleasant Valley killings.

Just before then, Holbrook had elected a sheriff named Commodore Owens. He was a handsome, soft-spoken man with long hair and he wore his six-gun at a cross-reach, meaning on the left with butt forward.

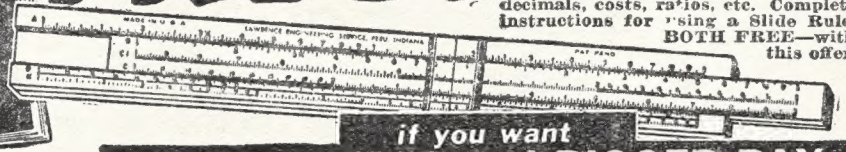
Holbrook was some dubious whether a good-looking, dudish sheriff who wore his gun at a long grab could amount to much. They had never seen him in action. He never had talked much. They waited to

*(Continued on page 10)*




# FREE!

**THIS VALUABLE NEW BOOK "Mathematics Made Easy" — gives you simplified instruction in every phase of figuring ALL types of work, PLUS a FREE DeLuxe Professional 10 inch SLIDE RULE. Saves time, simplifies all calculating, fractions, estimating, percentage, decimals, costs, ratios, etc. Complete instructions for using a Slide Rule. BOTH FREE—with this offer.**



*if you want*

## A BETTER JOB and BIGGER PAY

*Learn*

Thru New SHADOWGRAPH Method —You Read Blueprints the First Day

# BLUEPRINT READING

## AMAZING NEW INVENTION

**MAKES BLUEPRINT READING EASY AS SEEING A MOVIE**
**LEARN AT HOME — EASILY, QUICKLY — IN SPARE TIME**

**MEN of ALL AGES and ALL TRADES**
**if you are a**
Mechanic, Student, Welder, Carpenter, Plumber, Shipbuilder, Machinist, Sheet Metal Worker, Tool Maker, Electrician, Steel Worker, Aviation Mechanic, etc.
**you must know**
**Blueprint Reading**
**to win promotion and bigger pay**

## Thousands of Men Wanted At Once!

Better Jobs — Bigger Pay are waiting for men who can READ BLUEPRINTS. Here, at last, is a new quick and easy shortcut way to learn Blueprint Reading at Home in an amazingly short time — at an unbelievably low cost. This sensational "Shadowgraph" Method of Blueprint Reading was created by Nationally Famous Experts — skilled in teaching technical subjects to men without previous technical education. They have eliminated all complicated details, they explain all technical words in simple language. Contains everything you need to know about Reading Blueprints — no matter what kind of work you do.

## NOW ANYONE CAN READ BLUEPRINTS

Everything about Blueprint Reading is put right at your finger-tips! Simple as A, B, C. No need to attend an expensive trade or technical school. No previous technical or special education is needed. Here's a speedy Blueprint Reading Course for all trades that is ABSOLUTELY different. No dry textbooks — you learn by seeing and doing — and you READ BLUEPRINTS from the very FIRST DAY. With this amazing new method — a few minutes a day is all you need to read Blueprints on sight. This simplified, spare-time, Home Study Course meets all Blueprint Requirements for Civil Service and National Defense Jobs.

**CREATED BY NOTED EXPERTS:**
H. V. WALSH, B.A., Professor, Columbia U., 1919-1935; F. A. RAPPOLT, B.S., C.E., Prof., School of Tech., City College, N.Y.; F. E. BURNS, B.S., M.E., Prof., Newark Col. of Engineering.

## QUALIFY QUICKLY FOR A BIG PAY JOB

Here is really big news for you — if you have a job, or if you want a job in any branch of aviation, shipbuilding, sheet metal work, welding, electricity, machine tooling, plumbing, carpentry, radio, building automotive and Diesel Engineering, or any other of the mechanical, construction or DEFENSE INDUSTRIES — the AUSTIN TECH. "Shadowgraph" Method CAN HELP YOU QUALIFY for a BETTER JOB AND BIGGER PAY in an amazingly short time. This marvelous home-study method is so easy — it enables even a schoolboy to learn Blueprint Reading from the first day!

This 24-Volume Blueprint Reading Course is packed in a specially constructed bookcase, which in itself is a unique "Working Model" designed to enable you to read Blueprints from the first day. The Course contains over 600 Actual Blueprints—Charts—Tables—Diagrams—Signs—Symbols and other Instructive Pictures that help you to read Blueprints practically on sight.

## EVERYTHING IS SENT TO YOU AT ONCE!

**The complete 24-Volume Blueprint Reading Course is sent to you together with the specially constructed "Working Model" Bookcase. You also get FREE—"Mathematics Made Easy" and Professional Slide Rule. Everything is sent in one shipment. ACT TODAY—DUE TO RISING PRICES FREE GIFT OFFER IS LIMITED.**

**AUSTIN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE**
**899 Broad Street, Div. SM-1, Newark, N. J.**
**Canadian and Foreign orders accepted. Full amount must accompany order.**

## SEND NO MONEY

## FREE EXAMINATION

**AUSTIN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE**
**899 Broad St., Div. SM-1, Newark, New Jersey**

Send me on FREE APPROVAL your complete 24-Volume Blueprint Reading Course with special "Working Model" Bookcase. I am to get FREE "Mathematics Made Easy" and Professional Slide Rule. I will pay postman $1.95, plus postage and C. O. D. charges on arrival. If I return everything within 5 days you are to refund my money in full. Otherwise I will remit $2 monthly for 3 months and a final payment of $1 for the 4th month until the total price of $8.95 is paid. (10% discount if full payment accompanies order—same refund guarantee.)

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Reference.....

Address.....

**NOTE: If you enclose $1.95 with coupon—we will pay all postage charges. Every cent refunded if not satisfied.**

SUPER JU JITSU

WHEN THIS HAPPENS TO YOU···

DO THIS

···OR DO THIS

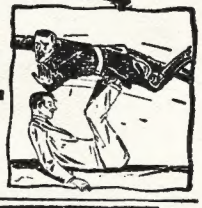
How to Destroy Your Enemy Quick!

Be a one-man blitz! Strike with Commando lightning! You don't need ox-like muscles to use Super Ju Jitsu, most powerful of all defense and attack methods. *Technique* is the deadly secret. Brains count—not size, not strength. Almost miraculously efficient.

GAIN SELF-CONFIDENCE

Learn how YOU can lick brutes twice your size *with your bare hands only*, even when they are armed with gun, knife, club. Get ready now for any emergency—protect your loved ones. This amazing new self-study course teaches you double-quick. No boring exercises necessary.

SEND FOR EXCITING DETAILS···FREE



FREE

Startling low price. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back. Mail coupon right now...TODAY, sure . . . time is short!

Nelson Co., 500 Sherman St., Dept. M528 Chicago

Please rush me, free, the hard-hitting details about "Super Ju Jitsu." No obligation on my part.

Name_____

Address_____

High School Course at Home — Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-158, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

FREE! $5.00 Full Size FOOD & HOUSEHOLD PRODUCT ASST.

Send No Money! Rush name and address for big Assortment of FOODS, GROCERIES, SOAPS, Etc.—full size packages, worth $5.00. Yours ABSOLUTELY FREE! Show these products to friends, neighbors. Take orders for sensational values, more than 260 quality products used in every home. Earn big profits, full or spare time. No experience necessary. Write for FREE $5.00 Assortment of Products NOW.

ZANOL, 6412 Monmouth, Cincinnati, O.

MUSIC COMPOSED TO POEMS — Send poem for consideration. Any subject — Patriotic, Love, Home, Swing, Sacred. PHONOGRAPH ELECTRICAL TRANSCRIPTIONS, $7, from your word and music manuscripts.

Keenan's Music Service — The Old Experienced Organization

P. O. Box 2140 (Dept. TF) Bridgeport, Conn.

730 SHAVES FROM 1 BLADE

AMAZING NEW BLADE SHARPENER

New sharpener for all makes of double-edge razor blades performs miracles! "Not necessary to change blades," writes one user. Another says, "Have used 1 blade over 730 times." RAZOROLL really sharpens blades because it strops on leather. Gives keen, smooth shaving edges. No guesswork. Blade held at correct angle and proper pressure—automatically. Just turn crank to sharpen blade. No gears. Well made. Handsome, compact, sturdy. Weighs few ounces. Will last years. Makes ideal gift.

Only $1.00

SEND NO MONEY! Write today. Pay postman only $1 plus few cents postage. Use RAZOROLL for 5 days and if you're not delighted with smooth, velvet shaves you get, return RAZOROLL and we'll return your dollar. Hurry—order today.

RAZOROLL COMPANY

520 North Michigan Avenue, Dept. 201, Chicago, Illinois


## THE HOME CORRAL

*(Continued from page 8)*

see what Sheriff Commodore Perry Owens was going to do about this blowhard, Andy Cooper.

The sheriff started out with a horse-stealing warrant for Cooper. He traced him to a house, crossed the porch and rapped. The door opened. The two men faced. The sheriff ordered Cooper out. Cooper refused and dodged behind the door and fired. Other shots poured out of the house. By now it was plain that it was an ambuscade, filled with Cooper's friends.

The new sheriff went for that cross-draw, running to the street and to the partial cover of a wagon. The fight lasted about one minute, witnesses claimed. When it was over, three outlaws were dead and a fourth, wounded, was arrested.

The new sheriff of Holbrook miraculously escaped without so much as a scratch. He became a U. S. marshal later. Cooper was buried without ceremony.

*Desperadoes from Everywhere*

By now it was evident that the Pleasant Valley War was drawing desperadoes from far and wide. They came for excitement, for gun play, and to make themselves reputations. Perhaps they wouldn't have come if they could have foreseen that practically every main participant in this savage, five-year range war would die before it ended.

Along about then Sheriff Mulvenon comes whooping back from Prescott. He hid himself and his posse in the Perkins store in a up-country town called Payson.

Sheriff Mulvenon polished off two wanted men with his double-barreled shotgun and perforated the hides of a few more.

*The Last Graham*

The war dragged on till Tom Graham was the only survivor of his family. He took time off, during a lull, to go down to Tempe and get married. He astonished his friends by returning to Pleasant Valley with his bride.

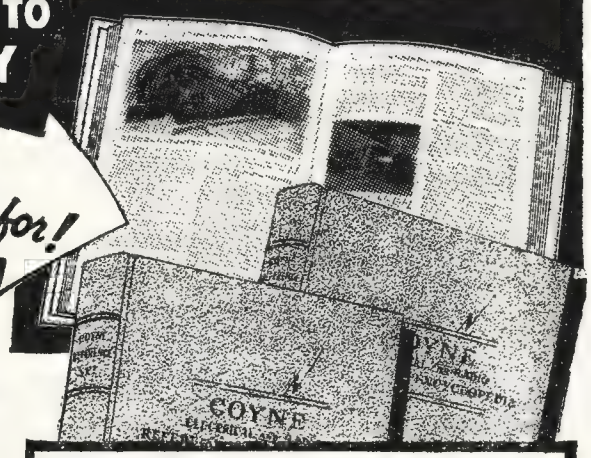
The law was getting things sorted out by now and took a flock of Tonto feudists to the Territorial capital for trial. There, strangest of all sights, were the opposing Tewksbury and Graham factions camped, side by each, at the Okey Corral in Prescott. In that brief, bitter truce, no word was spoken between them.

*(Continued on page 12)*

# ELECTRICIANS

## ..AND THOSE WHO WANT TO KNOW ELECTRICITY

*Here are the Books You've Been Waiting for!*




## SEE THIS 3-VOLUME SET ON 7 DAYS FREE TRIAL

**Here at last!** What every Electrician, service man, radio man, maintenance man, in fact, any man interested in Electricity, has long needed!

It's an amazing 3-volume set of Electrical Books to help you solve your everyday problems in an easy, practical way, and to increase your knowledge of the electrical field.

## Written So You Can Understand It!

The material is written so **you don't have to wade through a lot of useless theory.** It comes to the point and tells you in **simple, understandable language** about any electrical subject. Every subject is indexed so you can quickly locate it.

Covers everything from simple low voltage wiring to power house work—armature winding, A.C. and D.C. motors, generators, doorbell and alarm system wiring, house wiring, electronics, automotive and aviation electricity, refrigeration, air conditioning, etc., etc.

It is a course of Electricity in itself, and **so indexed that it also serves as a Reference Set.** Used by hundreds of Electricians on the job—service men—maintenance men—Radio men—students, etc.

## FREE WITH SET

One year of Consultation Service by mail from the **Coyne staff of instructors.** Act now and I'll include certificate entitling you to Technical Service by mail for one year on any special Electrical or Radio problem, after you purchase these books.

**H. C. LEWIS, President**
**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**
**500 South Paulina St., Dept. 13-R-7, Chicago, Ill.**

## 43 YEARS' EXPERIENCE

**in Practical Shop Methods, Packed into This Great Three-Volume Set!**

The material in these books duplicates as nearly as is possible in book form, the practical **"Learn-by-Doing"** training given in the shops of the **Coyne Electrical School.** They are written around our **practical course of training** by our own staff of instructors, who know Electricity and know how to teach it **in an easy understandable way.**

**1200 PAGES,** each **8½x11 inches. Over 2000 pictures and Diagrams. 2000 Subjects plainly indexed. Handsome Red and Gold Leatherette Binding.** ***A set you will be proud to own and use for a lifetime.***

## EXAMINE FREE 7 DAYS

**Send No Money—Just Mail the Coupon!** I'm so sure you'll never part with this set, once you see it, that I want to send it to you on 7 day FREE TRIAL. Mail coupon today. If you're satisfied with the books, send $3 in 7 days and $3 a month until the regular price of $12 is paid. If not satisfied, send 'em back in 7 days and you won't owe me a penny.

**H. C. LEWIS, Pres., Dept.13-R-7**
**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**
**500 South Paulina Street, Chicago, Ill.**

**FREE TRIAL COUPON**

Send me, postpaid, the big **Coyne Electrical Reference and Instruction Encyclopedia.** Within 7 days after receiving the books, I'll either return them or send you $3, and $3 a month until advertised price of $12 is paid.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

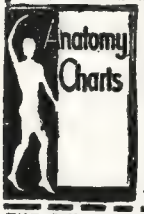
OCCUPATION.....AGE.....

**SAVE 10%.** Send cash price, $10.80, with order if preferred—you save $1.20. Same 7-day free trial and return privilege.

# Learn this Profitable Profession

## in 90 Days at Home

Hundreds of men and women of all ages 18-50 make $10.00 to $20.00 in a single day giving scientific Swedish Massage and Hydro-Therapy treatments. There is a big demand from Hospitals, Sanitariums, Clubs, Doctors and private patients as well as opportunities for establishing your own office. Learn this interesting money-making profession in your own home by mail, through our home study course. Same instructors as in our NATIONALLY KNOWN resident school. A diploma is awarded upon completion of the course. Course can be completed in 3 to 4 months. High School training is not necessary. Many earn big money while learning. The Army and Navy need hundreds of experts—both men and women.




**Anatomy Charts & Booklet FREE**

Enroll now and we will include uniform coat, medical dictionary, patented reducing roller and Hydro-Therapy supplies without extra cost. The reducing course alone may be worth many times the modest tuition fee.

Send coupon now for Anatomy Charts and booklet of photographs and letters from successful graduates. These will all be sent postpaid—FREE.

THE College of Swedish Massage
Dept. 663—30 E. Adams St., Chicago

You may send me FREE and postpaid, Anatomy Charts, booklet containing photographs and letters from graduates, and complete details of your offer.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

# POEMS WANTED

**For Musical Setting**

Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject. Don't Delay—Send us your Original Poem at once—for immediate consideration and FREE Rhyming Dictionary.

**RICHARD BROTHERS** 74 WOODS BUILDING CHICAGO, ILL.

# FALSE TEETH

**6th YEAR**

Buy where thousands have been satisfied. We make FALSE TEETH for you from your own impressions.

LOW AS **7.95**

90 DAY TRIAL
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE of SATISFACTION protects you.
SEND NO MONEY

*Write Today for Free Booklet and Material*

**J. B. CLEVELAND DENTAL PLATE CO.**
DEPT. 2-A3 EAST ST. LOUIS, ILLINOIS

# Learn to MOUNT BIRDS

**Tan SKINS, Make Up FURS**

Be a Taxidermist. *Double your hunting fun.* We teach you at Home. Mount Birds, Animals, Pets, Heads and Fish. Save your hunting trophies; decorate home and den. MAKE MONEY. Mount and Krome-tan for others. Big spare-time profits. INVESTIGATE TODAY.

FREE BOOK with 100 game pictures. 48 pages. Hunters, get yours! It's Now Free. Send postal card TODAY -- This Minute! State your AGE.

NORTHWESTERN SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY! Dept. 4171. Omaha, Nebr.

*Every Picture Packs a Thrill in*

**AMERICA'S BEST COMICS**

TEN CENTS EVERYWHERE


## THE HOME CORRAL

*(Continued from page 10)*

The trial wore down without any conviction.

There were no more pitched battles after that. But there was a long string of ambushes, sneak assassinations, and the lynching of three gents who happened to be forking horses with blurred brands.

Tom Graham gave up the ranch and went to farming down in Salt River Valley. In the spring of 1889 he was shot off of a wagon seat and Ed Tewksbury was arrested for the murder. He was finally dismissed in 1896, his health broken from long incarceration. His brother Jim was dead of measles. Ed died as a peace officer in the Arizona town where I was an awed, wondering young sprout.

*Everybody Lost!*

In that same year, in Cleveland's administration, the wool market went haywire and the Daggs brothers lost their sheep that was the start of the whole hellish business.

That was the end of the Pleasant Valley War, with everybody the loser. I've made a pretty sketchy account of it, hombres and hombresses, leaving out much exciting mention on account of it's unhealthy to pry up family skeletons if a man ever craves to go back to Arizona.

Now do you blame me for loosening up the hide of that know-it-all cuss who claimed the West is wild only in the storybooks?

—OLD DOC TRAIL.

### *OUR NEXT ISSUE*

ONCE again the drama and excitement of the rangeland live in the pages of POPULAR WESTERN as dauntless frontiersmen, fearless waddies and brave lawmen ride into action against their foes in the three novelets featured in our next issue.

Heading the list is an exciting yarn entitled GUNS OF ROARING RIVER, by Wilton West. Lance Harding, young rancher and prospector, was taking two sacks of gold from his hidden claim into town when he found a dead man beside the burned ruins of a covered wagon. Harding rode into town and reported his discovery to the sheriff and a posse went out to investigate.

Mace Shaw, the local banker, rode with the posse, and Harding did not like Shaw's attitude toward him.

When Harding learned that the dead man found at the wagon was named Jake Bonner, and discovered that Bonner's daughter had escaped when the wagon was attacked by a gang of ruthless gunslicks, he was sure that Mace Shaw was involved in the case.

Later when Lance Harding forced Shaw to open his safe, at gun's point, and there was a bundle there marked "Bonner—forty thousand," Harding's suspicions were confirmed.

*(Continued on page 112)*

# THE GENERAL STORE

## AN EXCHANGE SERVICE FOR READERS

*Here's where you can exchange something you have but don't want for something someone else has that you do want. This is a FREE service.*

*For example, if you have a camera and don't use it, and would like to have a stamp album, write: "Have Eastman camera, No. 1, Junior make, 3 years old, good condition, will exchange for stamp album with 3,000 stamps, 25 countries.—John Smith, 49 Park Street, Albany, N. Y."*

*Limit your request to 25 words. No goods for sale listed, nor requests concerning firearms or any illegal articles.*

*Type or hand-print clearly in submitting announcements. POPULAR WESTERN will not be responsible for losses sustained. Make very plain just what you have and what you want to "swap" it for. Enclose a clipping of this announcement with your request.*

*Address: General Store, POPULAR WESTERN, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.*

---

Few antique clocks, statues, old beautiful Indian baskets, Navajo rugs. Want any old U. S. coins, Florida bills. Lee Signor, P. O. Box 21, Dover, Florida.

---

Can use most anything of value. Have printing to order, commemorative medals, U. S. and foreign stamps. Morris Gometz, 4425 18th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

---

Have stamps, Indian relics, many late issue books. Will swap for photographic equipment, high-powered field glasses. Enlo Gilmore, Rt. 1, Box 102, Claremore, Okla.

---

Will trade stamps, equal value given. L. D. Walker, P. O. Box 724, Clinton, Okla.

---

Will trade type, type cases and printer's material, value over $100.00, mostly new and unused, for men's bicycle, new or nearly new. E. M. Brandt, 1111 So. 3rd St., Ironton, Ohio.

---

Trade: One $20, $25, or $50.00 Confederate bill for 75 Raleigh or Kool coupons or three different match covers for each coupon you send. Hilda Ewing, 412 W. 6th St., Jacksonville, Fla.

---

Will swap rare old stampless covers and scarce Armenia for telescopes, field glasses, sky maps, etc. What have you? Jerry Frankel, 441 Alabama Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

---

Have golf clubs and bag, deer head and large steer horns mounted, sleigh bells, Indian headdress, fur-lined overcoat, room-size rag rug. What have you? Arthur Duffy, Box 623, Clementon, N. J.

---

Have: Seth Thomas shelf-weight clock, old guitar, traffic management course, hobby items. Want: Dry goods, men's merchandise, good trunks and traveling bags. V. Coble, P. O. Box No. 6, Bentonville, Ark.

---

Have books, music. Want model craftsman, model railroad magazines. Antoinette, 16 E. 112th St., Chicago, Illinois.

FOR VICTORY
Buy
U. S. WAR SAVINGS
BONDS • STAMPS

*You may be sitting pretty now . . . but . . .*

**AFTER WAR, WHAT?**

You are probably sitting pretty now. Almost anyone can get a fair job with good money.

But when peace comes, when millions of men come out of the army and navy, when industry converts back—where will you be? There will be keen competition between companies and readjustments of many jobs. Will you be one whom industry labels "Must Keep"—even lists for promotion?

You can be by thorough preparation now. And you can prepare in spare time, without a moment's interruption of your present job, and at low cost. Thousands are doing it—are raising themselves above the crowd.

Ask for our free 48-page booklet on the field of your liking. Get the facts about the requirements and opportunities and about our practical home study training.

**LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**
***A Correspondence Institution***
**Dept. 1329-R** **CHICAGO, ILL.**

I want to know how I can prepare for post-war competition. Send me your free booklet on the field I have listed below.

☐ Foremanship ☐ Industrial Management
☐ Bookkeeping ☐ Accounting
☐ Traffic Management ☐ Executive Management
☐ Law: LL.B. Degree ☐ Salesmanship
☐ Business English ☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Stenotypy

*Name*.....*Age*.....

*Position*.....

*Address*.....

**When Capt. Prime (1812-1886)** retired, he followed the custom of fellow skippers—rocked a keg of whiskey under his rocking chair. Thus he duplicated the surge and pitch of his schooner, on which he'd mellowed many kegs of whiskey.

## Whiskeys Rocked at Sea and Ashore Inspired Smooth, Mellow Rocking Chair!

**These Old Whiskeys** taught Mr. Boston how keg-rocking improves flavor! So today, he attains Rocking Chair's richness by *controlled agitation in his special blending process.*

**Enjoy** the smoothness and mellow richness that brought "keg-rocked" whiskeys such enthusiastic acclaim — ask for Rocking Chair today. The price will delight your purse!

85 Proof (80 Proof in some States)
75% Grain Neutral Spirits
Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.

# OLD MR. BOSTON
BRAND
# ROCKING CHAIR
BLENDED WHISKEY

## But Liquor Shopping Is Now a Cinch

*by don herold*

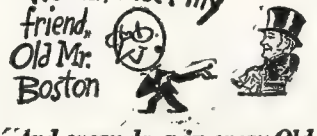
There are too many labels in the liquor world. I used to be baffled by all those bottles.

**Even the best of liquor companies ball you up because each puts a lot of different brand names on his products.**

***Who makes what? And how good? And how much?***

That's why I jumped with glee when I found I could say one name —"Old Mr. Boston"—in any liquor store and be dead sure of catching top-notch quality in almost any type of fine liquor I needed . . . and at a price that wouldn't tear the lining out of my wallet.

*I've collected 35 bottles of Old Mr. Boston on my home bar—heart-warming Whiskeys, glorious Gins, brisk Brandies, rollicking Rums and a whole line-up of captivating Cordials and Liqueurs.*




***"And every drop in every Old Mr. Boston bottle sings with that craftsmanship which for over 300 years has been the just pride of Old Boston Town.***

*You don't have to own a complete Old Mr. Boston home bar, right off, as I do.*

Just start off saying "Old Mr. Boston" to your liquor dealer, and let Old Mr. Boston grow on you.

Buffalo Billy Bates flung the spade at the Arapahoe

# Tomahawk Trail

## By SCOTT CARLETON

*A fighting scout combats savage Arapahoe Indians when slaughter and destruction menace the Gros Ventre country!*

BUFFALO BILLY BATES stood tense and motionless, the night wind blowing the long, tawny hair that brushed his buckskin-clad shoulders. The young scout's keen gaze searched the rugged terrain, probing the black shadows for signs of danger. Then his eyes again swung to the ruins of the covered wagon.

"Figgered we'd saved 'em all," he muttered. "But this wagon must have

A BUFFALO BILLY BATES STORY

been follerin' a considerable distance behind the rest of the train."

Somberly he stared at the tattered canvas, the dead horses in the brush. Then he glided forward, pantherlike, eyes fixed on scuffed boots sticking out beyond a wheel of the big wagon.

Not more than a week ago Bates and Colonel Cody, the famous "Buffalo Bill" who had taught the art of scouting to Buffalo Billy Bates, had battled a savage band of Arapahoe Indians here in the Gros Ventre plains of Wyoming. They had saved a wagon train from ruthless destruction, and Cody and Bates had been sure that the Arapahoe threat to the Gros Ventre country had been wiped out. But it looked as though they had guessed wrong.

He gave the boots beside the wagon wheel a powerful tug. It was a dead man he dragged from beneath the wagon, a man whose head was a pitiful, gory object.

"Scalped," muttered Buffalo Billy Bates.

He lifted his head abruptly, listening. Inside the wagon he heard a faint scratching sound. To his ears came a muffled young voice.

"I ain't afraid of Indians! Please let me out!"

Bates swung up into the covered wagon. The scratching sound came from inside a big water barrel. He lifted the wooden lid that was wedged tight.

A tousled-haired little boy stared at him, round-eyed. Buffalo Billy Bates lifted the boy out. He was not more than seven, but was trying hard to be brave.

"I'm Buffalo Billy Bates," the scout said in a friendly tone. "Who are you?"

"Jimmy Marshall," the boy said. "Grandpa hid me in the water barrel when the Indians came." He peered anxiously at Bates. "Where's Grandpa? I want to tell him I'm all right."

That still figure lying on the ground outside! That was sure to be Jimmy's grandparent. It would be hard to tell the boy.

"Were just you and yore grandpa travelin' in the wagon?" Bates asked.

"That's all," Jimmy said. "We came from Missouri and Grandpa was taking me to Mother and Dad. They settled in Oregon and sent for us." He hesitated, then spoke with the wisdom of the very young. "Grandpa's gone, isn't he? The Indians got him."

"That's right, Jimmy," Bates said softly.

"Big boys nearly eight years old don't cry even when"—Jimmy's voice trembled—"awful things happen."

"No, Jimmy. I don't reckon they do."

"Grandpa and I were going to have a lot of fun on the Fourth of July," said Jimmy, blinking. "We were taking a box of fireworks to Oregon."

Buffalo Billy Bates nodded, but did not answer. He knew it was dangerous for them to remain there. At any time the Indians might return in search of further loot, and there might be too many of them to fight.

He swept Jimmy up in his arms and jumped down out of the wagon, shielding the boy from the sight of his dead grandfather. That scalped figure might leave a lasting impression on one so young.

"I'm not a baby," protested Jimmy manfully. "You don't have to carry me."

"I know," said Buffalo Billy with a laugh. "Only we can move faster this way. Besides, I've got a job for you, Jimmy."

Bates headed into the brush where he had left his big Morgan and his sorrel pack-horse ground-hitched. The night was still—too quiet to suit the young scout. There was foreboding in the breathless hush.

Bates swung Jimmy up into the saddle of the Morgan, but left the horse ground-hitched.

"You stay here and guard the hosses, Jimmy," he whispered. "I'm goin' back to the wagon—want to tend

to somethin' there."

"Could we take the fireworks with us when we leave?" Jimmy whispered. "It isn't such a big box. I think Grandpa would like them to have those fireworks in Oregon."

"All right," promised Bates, with a smile. "I'll get the box."

He went back to the wagon. He couldn't leave Jimmy's grandfather lying there, even though taking time to dig a grave might be dangerous. In the wagon Buffalo Billy found a spade, selected a place and began to dig.

He tried to make as little sound as he could, but it was impossible to dig silently in the stony ground. Swiftly, though, the shallow grave took shape. Then, wrapping the body in a blanket, Buffalo Billy placed it in the grave, shoveled in dirt, and placed small stones on top of it.

He had just picked up the spade when he whirled at a slight sound. He caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure and swung the spade as a paint-daubed brave lunged at him with up-raised tomahawk. The edge of the spade caught the Indian on the side of the head, knocked him to the ground. The tomahawk flew out of his hand.

FROM the brush Buffalo Billy Bates heard the *thrum* of a bow-string. He clutched the spade in front of his broad chest with light-ning speed. The arrow aimed at his heart clanged against metal and dropped, its power spent, as out of the shadows loomed an evil-faced warrior, again raising bow and arrow for the kill.

"Yuh ain't gettin' me so easy!" roared Bates.

He flung the spade at the Arapahoe with such force it knocked the taut bow aside and all but sliced the brave's throat. Moccasined feet shot into the air as the Indian went down.

Buffalo Billy's hand came up from his holster, gripping the butt of his Dragoon .44. He searched the shadows for more Indians. But there was no motion, no faint sound to indicate that other braves were stalking him.

"No way of bein' shore though," he thought grimly.

He did not want to use his gun if it could be avoided. The sound would carry far in the night stillness.

The two braves were struggling to their feet. He leaped to the nearest and lashed down hard with the gun barrel. The warrior crumpled, knocked out completely.

Bates had his gun lifted to strike the other brave when a copper-hued arm flashed out. Fingers tightened around Buffalo Billy's ankle and tugged. He landed so heavily on his back that it jarred the wind out of him.

The warrior leaped to his feet, a sheath knife in his hand. Bates rolled over swiftly—the blade missing his throat by inches. He had clasped the brave tightly around the legs before the Indian could strike again.

Like a circus strong man lifting a weight, Bates stood erect, holding the warrior by the legs. The Arapahoe slashed at him with the knife, but was off balance and went hurtling to the ground head-first as Buffalo Billy re-leased his grip.

"Reckon I better put yuh out of this fight permanent," growled the scout, grabbing up the gun he had dropped. "And quick!"

He was thinking of the boy's grand-father when he brought the Colt down so hard that it cracked the warrior's skull.

Bates thrust the Dragoon .44 back into holster and grabbed up the bow and arrow he had knocked from the other Indian's hands. He whirled to attack—but the other Arapahoe had stealthily disappeared!

"I better get Jimmy and me out of here, pronto," was Buffalo Billy's swift thought. "That brave is likely to round up half his tribe and come back after us."

The young scout possessed plenty

of courage, but Colonel Cody had taught him that when there was a chance of being greatly outnumbered by his foes it was wisest to beat a hasty retreat.

He ran to the wagon and climbed in. By the aid of a lighted match he quickly found the small box of fireworks, for it was plainly marked "Fireworks".

"Just why that kid wants to lug fireworks all the way to Oregon is beyond me," thought Buffalo Billy as he left the wagon with the box under one arm. "But since he wanted them special-like I'll bring 'em to him."

As silently as an Indian himself he made his way back to where Jimmy was waiting with the horses. The boy breathed a sigh of relief as he saw the scout.

"I was gettin' worried," he said. "What happened?"

"Got into a little argument with a couple of redskins," Buffalo Billy told him, fastening the box on the pack on the pinto.

"Indians!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Did you kill them?"

"Just one," said Bates, walking over to the big Morgan horse. "The other got away. Slide back, Jimmy. We got to ride double on that hoss."

JIMMY slid back until he was sitting on part of the saddle blanket. Buffalo Billy had the lead rein of the pack-horse in his hand. He loosened the string on the bow and thrust it and the arrow into the saddle-boot with his rifle.

Then Bates swung up into the kak and rode away, leading the pack-horse, and with Jimmy clinging to his back. He was heading for a trapper's cabin six miles away where Buffalo Bill Cody was waiting for him. They had been bound for Fort Flintlock, the Army outpost in the Idaho country, and had stopped to rest a few days at the trapper's cabin after they had saved the wagon train.

Buffalo Billy Bates had been on a little exploring trip when he had discovered the covered wagon that had been attacked by the Indians that day. Now he was anxious to reach the cabin before the Arapahoe who had escaped could round up an attacking force.

The moon rose, and the way he guided the two horses over the soft grass so that their hoofs made little sound revealed the skill of the young scout.

"It's kind of exciting to ride through Indian country like this at night, isn't it?" whispered Jimmy.

"Shore is," agreed Buffalo Billy. "It'll be more so if we run into some of the redskins."

"Grandpa told me something I was to remember, no matter what happened, when he hid me in the water barrel," Jimmy said thoughtfully. "But I just can't think what it was now."

"Never mind." Bates' tawny eyes peered anxiously into the black shadows. "Mebbe it'll come to yuh later, Jimmy. We better not talk much. Voices carry on a night like this."

He swung the big Morgan, heading for the Gros Ventre River. It was near there, at the cabin of a fur trapper named Matt Harvey, that Buffalo Billy Bates and Colonel William F. Cody had been staying.

Bates felt relief when finally the log structure loomed ahead in the moonlight. Yet there was a deserted air about the place that worried the scout. The door was tightly closed and no faint gleam of light came from the narrow windows.

"Wonder if Colonel Cody and Matt Harvey pulled up stakes and left," muttered Bates.

"Did you expect to find someone here?" asked Jimmy, peering around Buffalo Billy's back at the cabin.

"I shore did, Jimmy," said Bates. He halted the big horse and slid out of the saddle. "Here"—he handed the boy the reins—"you take care of the hosses again while I have a look."

With his hand on his Dragoon pistol he warily approached the closed cabin door. As he pushed it open it struck against something and stuck.

Bates shoved harder, but the door was moving something heavy as it swung back slowly. Buffalo Billy edged through the opening and reached into a pocket of his buckskin jacket for a match.

He lighted it, then stood motionless, staring down at the pain-distorted face the flickering light revealed. The trapper was sprawled on the floor of the cabin, an Indian arrow sticking out of his chest.

"Harvey!" muttered Bates. "And the Indians got him."

The match burned his fingers and he was forced to drop it. In frantic haste he lit another. With cold fear gripping his heart he looked around the cabin. Had the Indians killed Buffalo Bill Cody, too?

BATES moved to a table and held a match to the wick of an oil lamp. The yellow glow flooded the cabin. Relief swept over the young scout as he saw that Buffalo Bill was not sprawled out on the floor.

"But where is he?" Bates wondered, frowning. "He wouldn't have left Matt to fight the Injuns by hisself if he knew there was trouble stirrin'."

Hastily Bates searched for clues to tell him what had happened before Matt Harvey had gone down from an Indian arrow. The trapper evidently had been dead for some time. Yet he had not been scalped.

"Looks like the Indians didn't get a chance to count coup on Matt," Bates decided, puzzled.

The glitter of a brass shell caught his eye and he picked it up. By the caliber he knew that it had come from Colonel Cody's rifle, for the trapper had used a different type of long gun. Other similar shells were scattered about.

"Buffalo Bill must have been fightin' right alongside of Matt," thought Bates. "Reckon when Harvey got downed Colonel Cody figgered there wasn't anythin' more he could do for Matt. Guess he drove the Injuns away though."

The young scout decided that after Harvey had died Buffalo Bill must have managed to escape from the cabin. Perhaps he had gone in search of his young protêgé to warn Buffalo Billy Bates that danger from the Arapahoes was still rampant in the Gros Ventre country.

"And Colonel Cody knew I was exploring over north," muttered Buffalo Billy. "If he circled around after leavin' here, so the Injuns couldn't pick up his trail easy, then headed north, he was likely to run plumb smack into trouble at that covered wagon where I found the boy."

Bates blew out the lamp and stepped out of the cabin. He was torn between two desires. One was to hasten to the aid of Buffalo Bill, and the other was to be sure of the boy's safety. He could not take Jimmy Marshall with him while he went in search of Colonel Cody, yet dared not leave the boy alone where he might be found by stalking Arapahoes.

Buffalo Billy lifted Jimmy down out of the saddle of the Morgan. The boy was glad to stretch his legs, for he had been seated on the big horse for a long time that night.

"You didn't find your friends?" he asked, looking up at Buffalo Billy Bates anxiously.

"I found one of 'em," the scout said soberly. "He's inside the cabin. The Indians killed him."

"I guess you feel like I do about Grandpa now, Mr. Bates," Jimmy said forlornly.

"Call me Billy," said the scout.

"All right." Jimmy nodded. "Was it Buffalo Bill that got killed?"

"No, it was a trapper named Matt Harvey. But I've got to try and find Buffalo Bill." Bates smiled at the boy. "Do yuh think yuh could pretend yuh're a bear for a while, Jimmy?"

"I guess so, Billy." Jimmy's face wore a doubtful expression. "What do you mean?"

"Sometimes bears find a cave or some place like that to hide, and they stay there and keep still and nobody can find 'em."

"I know," said Jimmy. "Grandpa told me about bears that slept all winter. I wish I could think what it was Grandpa wanted me to be sure and remember."

BUFFALO BILLY BATES had recalled that William Cody had told him, when they had discovered a big hollow trunk of a dead tree not far from the cabin the previous day, about how a boy had managed to escape from attacking Indians by hiding all night in a hollow log. This had been in his mind when he had mentioned bears to Jimmy Marshall. If he could get the boy to stay in that hollow tree trunk until he returned from seeking Buffalo Bill, his young charge might be safe from prowling redskins.

"I'll play bear," Jimmy promised bravely. "Where do you want me to hide, Billy?"

"Come on, I'll show you."

Buffalo Billy led the boy to the hollow tree trunk and helped Jimmy climb in. It was a big enough space for the boy to be able to sit down, and there was little chance of his being discovered.

"Stay right where yuh are until I get back, Jimmy," Bates admonished. "I won't be gone long."

"All right," said Jimmy. "But hurry back. I'm not so sure I'm going to like playing bear." He yawned and his tousled head nodded sleepily. The little boy was very tired. "I'll be waiting."

Buffalo Billy hurried away. He took the pack off the pinto and hid it near the cabin. He let the horse run free, sure that it would not stray too far away. Then he swung into the saddle of the big Morgan and galloped across the Gros Ventre plains in search of Colonel Cody.

As he approached the spot where he had found the covered wagon Bates reined in his horse and sat listening, ears straining for any unusual sound in the muted music of the night. He heard the wind rustling through the broad expanse of mesquite to the southward, faint movement back in the brush to the north that could be caused by little animals of the forest, or by stealthily stalking Indians.

He knew that danger ever lurked in the shadows all about him, but accepted the hidden perils of his mission with the fearlessness that was part of his stalwart nature. He could take care of himself in time of trouble. He had proved that many times.

It was about Buffalo Bill that he worried. There was no doubt that Cody was far too experienced an Indian scout to blunder heedlessly into any trap the Arapahoes might have set for him. Still the Indians were cunning and could strike silently and without warning.

Buffalo Billy Bates frowned as an alien sound came ringing through the grim stillness of the night. It was an eerie wailing such as might have come from some ghastly banshee. The crackling in the brush faded and grew still, the wind seemed to die down. It was as though all of the Gros Ventre plains had stopped to listen to that strange cry that came out of the blackness to the northward.

"Somethin' mighty strange about that," muttered Bates, as he listened. "I better see what it is that's howlin'."

He slid out of the saddle, ground-hitching the Morgan in the deep shadow beneath the branches of a great tree. Then Buffalo Billy headed northward on foot. The weird cries guided him onward. Like the sound of some strange siren they rose and fell, but grew louder as he advanced.

Finally he spied a clearing ahead, and caught the flickering red light of a fire. Paint-daubed, copper-skinned warriors moved restlessly in the wav-

ering glow. Their attention was fixed on a long-haired, buckskin-clad figure tied tightly to a tree, and it was from the white prisoner's lips that the weird wailing came.

HORROR swept over Buffalo Billy Bates as he recognized the captive. It was Colonel Cody! And from the sounds he was making the great frontiersman had apparently gone insane. The wild cries ceased, and Cody began mouthing strange gibberish—the raving of a madman.

Bates felt sick at heart. Had the Indians tortured Cody so ruthlessly that Buffalo Bill had lost his reason? Had his keen brain snapped because of pain that had been impossible to bear?

He saw that the Indians were moving back. The weird mouthings of their prisoner was something they could not understand and it brought fear to their primitive souls. They did not relish even lingering in the vicinity of a crazy man. To them their captive had become a thing of evil that was better left alone.

"Put out fire," commanded an Arapahoe chief. "We go—leave crazy man here."

Braves quickly stamped out the fire, and as the embers died down, then went out, the shadows of the night crept across the clearing. The moon had disappeared behind the clouds that were growing thicker in the sky.

Again Buffalo Bill started his weird, wailing cry. Bates moved, edging his way around and silently circling the clearing so that he could creep up behind the prisoner without being seen by the Indians.

He paused frequently to listen. He heard the guttural voices of the retreating warriors, the crackling of the brush, and then the sounds faded. But the wailing noise continued to issue from the lips of Buffalo Bill.

Bates edged closer to his friend who was tied to the tree. He reached it and drew the bowie knife that Colonel Cody himself had presented him with on his twenty-first birthday.

"It's Buffalo Billy, Colonel," Bates whispered softly. "I've come to set yuh free."

The strange wailing noise ceased as Bates' keen-bladed knife cut through the ropes that bound Buffalo Bill to the tree. Cody stepped away from the tree when he found that he was free. He swung around to face the young scout.

Buffalo Billy Bates waited tensely, for he also was sure this was a madman who confronted him. He had no idea what Cody might do next. He might even attack his rescuer, and Buffalo Billy knew he could not possibly fight this man, his long-time friend.

"Nice work, Billy," Colonel Cody said calmly, and quite rationally. "I figgered if yuh were anywhere around yuh would hear that wild yellin' I was doin' and come to see what was wrong."

Relief swept over Bates. Colonel Cody was not insane! It had been just a trick upon the part of Buffalo Bill to fool the Indians and signal for help at the same time. It had been a masterpiece of acting, for even Buffalo Billy Bates had believed that the great scout had gone completely crazy.

"Yuh shore had me fooled as well as the Injuns, Colonel," he confessed with a twisted grin. "I figgered yuh had gone plumb loco."

"I assure yuh I'm quite sane." Cody laughed. "But we better get away from here before the Indians decide to come back. They probably will, when they stop to think it over and realize I might have been playin' a trick on them."

They hastened to where Bates had ground-hitched his big horse. Colonel Cody had already explained that he had been captured by Indians as he had been searching for Buffalo Billy in the vicinity of the covered wagon. The colonel had left his own horse hidden back in the brush and the ani-

mal had not been found by the Arapahoes.

WITHIN a short space of time both men were mounted and riding back toward the cabin. They swung over toward the river, and suddenly halted their mounts as they reached the bank and were able to peer out into the stream.

To their ears came the faint splashing of paddles. Five Indian war canoes loaded with painted braves loomed into view, heading down-river.

"They'll reach the cabin before we do!" whispered Buffalo Billy. "And that little settlement five miles farther downstream. We've got to try and beat 'em to it, Colonel."

"Right," agreed Cody. "Come on, Billy. Let's ride!"

They whirled their horses, making no attempt to ride silently now, for speed was the vital thing. From one of the canoes came a savage yell as the redskins spotted the two horsemen on the bank. The canoes began to move faster as the braves at the paddles increased their efforts.

The two scouts did not even bother to look back as they raced their horses toward the cabin a breakneck speed. Hoofs thundered over hard ground, pounded through the brush, and went on as the two horses tore through the night.

"The river's right narrow at the cabin!" shouted Cody. " Mebbe we can head the redskins off there."

"Can try!" called Buffalo Billy Bates grimly.

When they reached the cabin and reined their mounts, Bates first thought was of the little boy. He leaped out of saddle and ran to the hollow tree stump. He peered in, and smiled. Jimmy Marshall was still there, curled up fast asleep. The boy was safe.

"You ride to the settlement and warn the folks there that the Injuns are comin', Colonel," Bates quickly suggested as he returned to Cody. "I'll stay here and try to stop them redskins."

"All right," Cody agreed reluctantly. "But don't let 'em get you or the boy, Billy. I don't like leavin' yuh here alone, but somebody shore has to warn them folks down below in a hurry."

"I'll be all right," Bates said firmly, for a thought had struck him. "You get ridin', Colonel."

Buffalo Bill nodded and rode away, heading down the bank of the river to warn the settlers. Bates did not pause to watch him. At once the young scout went in search of the fireworks he had brought along at Jimmy's request. He found the box where he had hidden it and opened it with an axe he got from the trapper's cabin.

As he had hoped, there were a dozen skyrockets included in the fireworks. With these in his hand he ran to the bank of the stream and waited. Soon the first of the Indians in their birch-bark canoes loomed into view.

Buffalo Billy struck a match and lit a skyrocket. Instead of aiming it upward he had pointed it at the first canoe. There was a roar and a flash and the skyrocket went soaring through the air. It tore into the side of the canoe, and sparks and flames burst from it.

The Indians let out wild yells of terror and went plunging into the river. Jimmy Marshall climbed out of the hollow tree trunk and came running as he saw what Buffalo Billy Bates was doing.

"Let me shoot off some of them!" cried the boy, grabbing rockets out of the scout's hand. "I can do it."

"All right, Jimmy," said Bates. "You do it. I'll take care of all the redskins I can with my gun!"

ARAPAHOES were firing with guns and bows and arrows at the man and the boy on the bank of the river, but the rockets that were exploding all around the warriors spoiled their aim. Another canoe

started to flame as a skyrocket hit it and burst with a shower of sparks and vari-colored lights.

Bates' Dragoon .44 roared as he fired at the Indians—and his bullets sped true, for the canoes were close enough to permit six-gun shooting. Four of the five war canoes had been wrecked and the Indians who had not been killed were swimming for the far bank of the river.

THE battle of the fireworks had lasted for some time, though it had seemed to take place swiftly, when from the south came shouts and the thunder of hoofs. Buffalo Bill was returning, leading a bunch of well-armed and mounted men from the settlement.

"Good thing they got here," said Jimmy calmly. "I just shot off the last skyrocket. Gee, Billy, we shore have been having fun!"

Buffalo Billy Bates smiled as he reloaded his Dragoon .44 pistol once more. The boy had a strange idea of fun, he was thinking, but maybe Jimmy was right at that.

"We saw what yuh were doin' from down the river," called Colonel Cody as he and the men with him halted their horses nearby. "Shore was a smart trick, Billy."

"Never could have done it if Jimmy hadn't insisted that we bring his fireworks along," said Bates, grinning. "And he shore has been a great help."

"Jimmy who?" asked one of the men from among the settlers, looking intently at the boy.

"Jimmy Marshall," said Jimmy. "That's my name."

"Yuh're Clem Marshall's grandson?" asked the settler eagerly.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy. "Grandpa was with me but he got killed by the Indians. Who are you, Mister?"

"Why, I'm yore Uncle Seth!" cried the settler. "Clem wrote that he figgered on comin' through this way. Got the letter from a feller with the wagon train that passed through a week or so ago. I'm shore glad to see yuh, boy. Ain't set eyes on yuh since yuh was four years old."

"Reckon yuh'll see to it that Jimmy reaches his folks in Oregon safely then," said Buffalo Billy Bates, much pleased at this sudden turn of good fortune.

"Shore will," Seth Marshall promised. "I heard from the boy's pa and ma not so long ago. They're aimin' to buy a farm there as soon as they get enough money."

"Money?" repeated Jimmy vaguely, then laughed. "Why, that's what Grandpa told me to remember. There's five thousand dollars hidden in the wagon-bed of the covered wagon. Grandpa was going to give it to Dad to buy a farm." The boy looked around happily. "Guess it was a good thing that Buffalo Billy found me before the Indians burned the wagon."

"It shore was," agreed Seth Marshall. "Because he also saved us—him and Colonel Cody did—from the Injuns. We're all grateful."

A shout of agreement came from the other settlers. Bates and Cody just smiled.

*Further Exploits of Buffalo Billy Bates in*

SCOUT FROM FORT FLINTLOCK

*AN EXCITING COMPLETE ACTION NOVELET*

By SCOTT CARLETON

*Coming in the Next Issue*

# Prairie Wolf

*When Lem Bruce, railroad scout, uncovers a murderous sidewinder plot to block homesteading, he earns his kudos in a six-gun showdown against desperate odds!*

Sam Ratch killed Lem Bruce's friend, Dave Stephenson, during the stage hold-up

## CHAPTER I

### *Tracks in the Grass*

THE midday sun was a blazing ball in a cloudless sky. Heat waves danced across the land. The high grass bent beneath the hot wind of late summer. As far as a man could see in any direction there was nothing but a monotony of grass, grass, grass!

Through the sweltering heat, Lem Bruce rode slowly, sparing his horse, and himself. His sore leg had just begun throbbing again. He slouched to one side of his saddle in an effort to ease the discomfort.

His long, lean body swayed gracefully with the motion of his horse. His bronzed face was an inscrutable mask. His keen gray eyes missed nothing, and his ears were attuned to catch any foreign sound which might presage peril.

His horse stumbled suddenly, and snorted. Lem Bruce was instantly alert. His left hand tightened the reins as his right dropped swiftly to the gun he wore. His eyes searched the immediate vicinity quickly. Surprise flashed into his face when he saw what had made the horse stumble and show nervousness—deep ruts made by wagon wheels.

Lem Bruce bent from his saddle to investigate. He could make out that two wagons had passed, but not recently. The ruts were old and deep

By
JOHNSTON
McCULLEY

*A*
*Complete*
*Action-Packed*
*Novelet*

and partly filled with drifted dust. That meant the wagons had passed early in the spring when the ground was soft, the wheels sinking deeply into the moist earth and the sun baking the ruts hard afterward.

Bruce turned aside and followed the ruts to a spot where the grass was sparse, and there found hoofprints. There had been two teams, and smaller prints indicated a pony also. In another spot he found still other tracks which startled him—those of a cow.

Out here in the deep bosom of the prairie, tracks made by wagon wheels were startling enough. Yet they might mean only adventurers or outlaws. A cow meant settlers.

Bruce wondered how far the travelers had gone on. It was almost forty miles back to the nearest settlement, which was nothing but a cluster of sod houses and shacks beside the stage-coach trail. There was plenty of good land nearer the settlement. Why had settlers passed it to come out here?

BRUCE looked ahead. Passing early in the spring before the grass had stirred from its winter sleep as the wagons had, the wheels had crushed the grass roots. Where they had rolled, the grass had not grown so luxuriantly as elsewhere. Though obscured in spots, the trail could be seen winding through the rippling sea of rank growth.

Bruce followed the trail. He moved with extreme caution. He did not forget that he was in a country dangerous for him, where a traveler could be seen for miles and a hostile reception prepared for him as he approached.

He had been riding for about an hour when he pulled up his horse abruptly. To his nostrils the wind had carried the odor of wood smoke—and the aroma of baking bread.

Bruce rode to higher ground and saw a small sod house not far away. Near the house, a sod stable had been partly constructed. There was a small patch of ripening corn, another of potatoes and root vegetables. A few chickens were pecking around. Two work horses and a cow were grazing belly deep in the grass.

A covered wagon stood near the house, and the grass growing through the spokes of the wheels showed it had not been moved for some time. But there was no second wagon and team, nor a pony.

The wind was flapping the washing that was out on a line to dry. Bruce drew in his breath sharply when he saw the clothes. Women's things were hanging among the men's. So a woman was out here in this wilderness.

Without showing himself, Bruce watched the place. This might be something which concerned his secret mission on the prairie. The proposed railroad, for which Bruce had been scouting, had enemies. Some did not want the railroad at all, and others were hoping to profit by it at the expense of honest settlers.

Bruce had personal enemies, too, who might not hesitate to shoot him at sight. One was Sam Ratch, leader of an outlaw band. They had killed Dave Stephenson, Bruce's friend, during a stage-coach hold-up a few days before. Sam Ratch had a secret hideout somewhere on the prairie, and this sod house might be it.

Joe Malling, United States Marshal, was in doubt as to the real identity and appearance of Ratch, and half suspected Bruce of being the outlaw. For since Bruce rode around the country with three other men and told nobody his business, that aroused suspicion. He could not reveal his business here yet though, not even to the marshal.

Now Bruce rode cautiously on toward the sod house. While he was still some distance from it, a woman appeared in the doorway and saw him. She dodged back out of sight before Bruce could see her plainly, and a man emerged. Bruce stopped his

horse. "Hello!" he shouted. "Can I come on?"

The man at the house gestured assent. As Bruce rode forward, the man reached back and took a shotgun from the woman. With the gun held in the crook of his arm, he waited.

Bruce saw that he was middle-aged and small in body. His clothes hung on his frame loosely. He did not look like a hardy pioneer, but like a transplanted small farmer bewildered by his vast surroundings. The woman kept out of sight in the house.

Bruce stopped his horse and crossed his wrists on the saddle-horn.

"Howdy!" he greeted. "I'm Lem Bruce."

"I'm Ed Griffin," said the man. "Climb down and rest yore hoss."

LEM BRUCE dismounted and left his reins trailing. He was on guard as he limped forward. The man at the door did not look dangerous, but Bruce did not know how many others might be in the house, with their horses hidden behind it.

"Glad to find somebody here," Bruce said. "I need a little help. Got a sore leg that wants some doctorin'."

"I'll help if I can," Griffin replied. "Ridin' far?"

It was a fair question. Bruce had no outfit with him, and it was unusual for a man to be riding so far from a settlement without supplies.

"Don't blame yuh for bein' curious about me," Bruce said. "Not many folks hereabouts, and a passerby could be any kind."

"That's what I was thinkin'," Griffin frankly replied.

"Don't worry about me," Bruce said. "I'm harmless—to my friends. I'm only a prairie wolf prowlin' around."

And that was all he said. He did not want to give information about himself. Griffin might not be an innocent settler, despite his appearance. And Bruce and the three men who worked with him could take no risk of their activities becoming known. One mistake, and all their hard work might be undone.

They had completed scouting for the new railroad, and the surveyors would be at work soon. But the railroad company wanted to outwit landgrabbers by keeping the route of the new road a secret as long as possible.

The company wanted to make an agricultural empire of this country. It did not want land price booms to keep people away. If land grabbers learned too much, they might ruin the company's plans.

The land grabbers had their own scouts in the country, trying to locate and watch the company's scouts. And outlaws like Sam Ratch disliked the idea of a railroad altogether, for it would bring the Law into the country with it, and end preying on stagecoach lines and isolated settlements.

Bruce and Griffin studied each other as the talked. Now Griffin called softly, and the woman came into the doorway. Bruce was surprised when he saw her. He had expected a washed-out, spirit-broken woman of middle age with an expression of hopelessness in her face. But here was a girl of about twenty, tall and well-built and pretty.

"Mr. Bruce, this is my daughter, Elsie," Griffin said.

Bruce removed his hat and bowed. "Well, now! Who said we didn't have any beauty on the prairie?"

Elsie Griffin laughed and flushed rosy, but did not speak. She watched Bruce as he talked to her father.

"I saw yore wagon tracks and followed 'em here," Bruce was telling Griffin. "Looks like they were made last spring."

"That's right. I came out from Missouri to take up land, and timed my trip to get here in the spring."

"Yuh've done pretty well," Bruce commented.

"Built this sod house, but haven't finished the stable. I cleared away some grass and plowed, and got in a little corn and other truck."

"I don't see how one man could do so much in such a short time," Bruce said.

"I had help. Dan Paley, a young friend of ours, came with us, drivin' his own wagon. Him and my daughter aim to get married some day. Dan took up land south of me, over that ridge. He lives in his wagon, when he's not around here."

THAT explained where the second team and wagon had gone, and perhaps the pony.

"This Nebraska country will grow fast after the railroad comes," Griffin said. "I spotted this land and grabbed it. Good soil. Big creek a few miles east with heavy brush and some trees along it for wood. Soil not so good there, though. I dug a well and got fine water a few feet down. It's behind the stable."

"Yuh'd better finish the stable before winter," Bruce said. "Dig a cyclone cellar, too. It'll come in handy to store potatoes, root vegetables and seed corn. Ever have any visitors?"

"No. We've seen Indians passin' in the distance a few times, but they've never bothered us. Yuh're the first strange white man we've seen since we come here."

Bruce believed that to be the truth. He had about decided that Griffin was an honest settler. Bruce's face twisted suddenly as his leg gave him a nasty twinge, and Griffin noticed it.

"Oh, yore sore leg!" Griffin remembered. He leaned the shotgun against the house, and the girl moved over close to it quickly. "I'll 'tend to yore leg now. Come into the house, Elsie, go gather eggs while I'm doctorin' him."

The girl picked up the shotgun and went around the corner of the house. Bruce went inside with Griffin, ready for trouble. But no menace lurked inside.

The aroma of baking bread came from the oven. A kettle of water was boiling on the cook stove. A small cupboard held utensils and dishes. A rough table, some chairs and two cots completed the furnishings. One cot had a curtain which could be drawn around it for privacy.

"I've got medicines, and know somethin' about fixin' hurts," Griffin said. "Take a chair, and get off yore clothes."

Bruce slipped his gunbelt up above his waist and worked his pants down without removing belt or gun. If Griffin noticed that, he made no comment. He got a basin of hot water as Bruce peeled his underwear down to the tops of his boots.

Griffin put the basin on a stool and went to the cupboard for cloths and a jar of intment. He was back immediately, and began bathing the sore on Bruce's left leg. But suddenly he looked up with a strange gleam in his eyes.

"Why, this — ain't it a bullet wound?" he asked.

"That's right," Bruce confessed.

## CHAPTER II

### *Dark Suspicion*

GRIFFIN'S hands shook as he worked, but he said nothing more about the wound. He seemed to be waiting for Bruce to volunteer information.

Beyond remarking that the bullet had been extracted, Bruce said nothing. The wound was inflamed, but not dangerously so. All it needed now was a dressing. Griffin cleansed it, put on ointment and a bandage.

"Thanks," Bruce said, when Griffin was done. "I won't forget this kindness."

He righted his clothing and adjusted his belt and holster.

"Now, I'll have Elsie get yuh a hot meal," Griffin told him. "Havin' a

guest is a treat for us. Elsie is a good cook. Her mother taught her. Mother died two years ago. That's one reason I pulled up stakes and come out here."

He went outside with Bruce as the girl returned to prepare the meal, and they took Bruce's horse to the well to let him drink, now that he was cooled off. Bruce looked around at the meager crops.

"Yuh must guard against a prairie fire," he warned Griffin. "Better plow a wide strip all around yore place. A grass fire would wipe out yore crops and sweep everything clean."

"How's one start?" Griffin asked. "We're careful."

"They start easy—lightnin' durin' a summer storm, or somebody careless with a campfire. They can sweep for miles through the grass and leave nothin' but hot blackened earth behind."

"I'll plow a fire-break," Griffin promised. "There's so many things like that to be done. In this country, everything is so big. A man feels little and helpless and lost. I try to keep up my spirits—"

"That's right," Bruce said. "Stick it out, and yore winnin's will be big."

"It's for Elsie and Dan. I thought we'd combine the two pieces of land later, so's they'd have it all after I'm gone. It'd give 'em a good start in life. Dan's a good boy, but he needs anchorin' down. "

"Most boys do," said Bruce.

"I don't like to ask embarrassin' questions, Mr. Bruce, and I've always held that a man's business is his own. I want to start right in this new country, and don't want trouble with anybody. I must think of my daughter and protect her. No offense meant, but —yore wound?"

"Don't worry," Bruce interrupted. "There's not many bullets flyin' around the prairie, but it was my bad luck to stop one. There's an outlaw named Sam Ratch runnin' loose. Him and his men held up a stage-coach a few days ago. Dave Stephenson, a friend of mine, was in the coach. I'd gone to the settlement to meet him. But Ratch shot Dave durin' the hold-up, and he died later."

"I'm sorry," Griffin muttered.

"The marshal was miles away, but some of us took out after Ratch and his men. They scattered. We killed one and wounded a second, but Ratch and another got away. I had a little shootin' bee with Ratch, and he give me this wound in my leg. I aim to meet up with him again, on account of Dave." Bruce's face was grim as he spoke.

"Are yuh trailin' Sam Ratch now?" Griffin asked.

"No. I'm ridin' to meet three friends who're campin' a few miles from here."

BRUCE did not explain about his friends, or say what they were doing in this part of the country. Griffin was frowning as they went back to the house, as if he did not quite believe Bruce's story. Bruce left his horse in front of the house with reins trailing, as he had before.

Elsie Griffin had prepared a good meal. Bruce ate roast prairie chicken, eggs, newly-baked bread, had fresh milk and butter, and finished with a slab of dried-apple pie. It had been a long time since he had downed a home-cooked meal like that.

"Yuh like it here, Miss Elsie?" Bruce asked her.

"Oh, yes. I'm with my Father, and we'll get along. It's fine land. But—it does get lonesome at times."

"I can imagine!" Bruce said. "But, if the man yuh're to marry is near—"

Bruce thought that a cloud passed swiftly across her face, but she gave a prompt reply.

"Yes, that helps. We see Dan every day. There he is, coming now."

Through the doorway, they could see Dan Paley riding his pony toward the sod house through the blazing sunshine of late afternoon. He showed surprise and alarm when he saw

Bruce's horse in front of the house. Elsie hurried out to meet him.

"I wanted 'em to get married before we left home, but Elsie wouldn't," Griffin told Bruce. "Said she wasn't ready. Dan comes from our county back home. I've known his folks for years. A little restless sometimes, but a good boy."

The girl brought Dan Paley into the house and introduced him to Bruce. Paley was twenty-five, and husky. Bruce noticed that his manner was furtive. He was plainly suspicious of Bruce, and asked many questions.

Where had Bruce come from, where was he going, and where was his camp outfit? Had he heard any late news about the proposed railroad, or about any new towns?

Bruce was polite, but parried all the questions with skill. He talked plenty, but afterward the others realized that he had given them no facts about himself.

"I'll be gettin' along," Bruce said, finally. "A full moon will be shinin' tonight, and I can keep right on travelin'."

"That's the thing for a man to do—keep travelin'," Dan Paley said. "See and do things, and have a little excitement. Out here where a man seldom sees anybody—"

"It's a fine thing to take root in a new country," Bruce told him.

"I'm sick of it! Nothin' but grass! Grass and wind and coyotes howlin' at night! I wish we'd never come here!"

"Dan!" the girl rebuked.

"Oh, I just slopped over, Elsie. But I do think we made a mistake. There's nothin' here for us. We'll be old and gray before this country builds up and a lot of folks live in it."

GRIFFIN and Elsie stood at the door as Bruce went to his horse after thanking them for their hospitality. He caught the girl watching him, as if trying to make up her mind concerning him.

Dan Paley walked beside Bruce to his horse.

"Expectin' to drop by again?" Paley asked.

"I might," Bruce replied.

"Wherever yuh're goin', and whatever yuh're goin' to do, I wish I was ridin' with yuh."

"Yuh seem well fixed here, with fine land to turn into a farm, and a fine girl to marry."

"I don't want to get married and be tied down. Elsie is all right, but she don't want to marry me, either. That's why she wouldn't before we left home. It was our folks' idea. We were raised side by side, and the folks took it for granted."

"I've known cases like that," Bruce said.

"I didn't want to say anything in front of the others. But—well, I've got some sense, I hope. I know it's not usual for a man to ride alone around the prairie, off the beaten trails, without grub and a camp outfit."

"That's right," Bruce admitted.

"I heard about the outlaw they call the Prairie Wolf in the settlement last spring when we were drivin' through. Big reward for him, dead or alive, they said."

"That's right, but nobody's claimed the reward yet," Bruce said, smiling a little.

"Some folks said his right name was Sam Ratch. But of course he might call hisself anything."

"He might," Bruce agreed.

"The prairie—it'd be a mighty good place for a man to hide, if he knew his way around," Paley hinted.

"Mebbe."

"If yuh ever want a saddle pard, I might travel with yuh. My wagon and outfit really belong to Mr. Griffin, but the pony is mine. That's all a man needs in this country—a good pony, and some nerve."

"They're both good things to have," Bruce said.

He gathered up his reins, waved at

Griffin and Elsie, and they called to him to visit them again. Then Bruce rode away through the grass with the sinking sun at his back.

When the bright moon came up, he had reached the sluggish creek and was following it toward the north. He was tired. He was eager to reach the hidden camp, where his three men should be waiting for him.

Al Harley, built like a string bean but as hard as steel; Lew Burns, young, good-looking and quick on the trigger; "Buck" Wesson, middle-aged, seasoned and wilderness-wise.

They were good men. They had ridden with Bruce for more than a year.

He would have to tell them about Dave Stephenson's death, and what he had said before he died. And he would tell them about the Griffin outfit. Bruce had decided that Griffin was honest and well-meaning, but helpless in his new environment. Dan Paley was at the point where a man turns bad. Elsie—Bruce had been rather taken by her. She would make a splendid wife for some man in this new country.

He did not urge his horse, but let him pick his own way along the edge of the creek through the bright moonlight. He would soon reach the camp. His leg would heal in a few days while he rested.

BRUCE rode out of the high grass and started across a gravel slope beside the creek. His horse slipped on the treacherous gravel, stumbled and almost unseated Bruce.

But it was fortunate. For at the same instant, a bullet zipped past Bruce, and the crack of a gun came downwind to him. The wink of an amber flash at the edge of the grass a distance away told from where the shot had come.

As his horse regained footing, Bruce wheeled him sharply down the slope toward the edge of the grass and whipped out his own gun. Another slug missed him as his own gun belched flame and smoke and lead.

Then he had come to the edge of the grass and was spurring his horse through the shadows straight at the spot from which the shots had come. It was not one of his own men who had fired at him by mistake, he knew. They would have been expecting him, and would have given their private call first, so Bruce could have identified himself.

His assailant did not wait to fight it out. As Bruce jerked his horse to a stop, to strain eyes and ears as he looked ahead, he heard a sudden clatter of hoofbeats. The man who had fired was racing his horse across the hard ground at the edge of the grass.

The sounds changed, and Bruce knew the rider was in the grass, charging through it furiously. Bruce lost sight of the racing shadow as it merged with others.

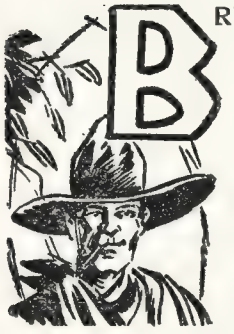
Bruce straightened in his saddle and gave a peculiar, ear-splitting yell. It answered almost at once from the far distance. But his men were too far away to reach him in time to give chase to the unknown who had shot at him. So Bruce turned his horse toward the distant camp, speculating as to the identity of his assailant.

It could have been Sam Ratch or one of the outlaw's men. Getting away after that stage-coach hold-up and the battle which had followed it, Ratch could have gone in almost any direction. And he would have tried to kill Bruce at sight.

There was a chance that it was a case of mistaken identity, that Bruce had been taken for somebody else. In the moonlight, and seen through the shifting shadows caused by the waving grass, a mistake would have been easy to make.

## CHAPTER III

### *Pony Tracks*



BRUCE rode on, gave the yell again, and had it answered from a short distance away. A few minutes later, he was riding with Al Harley and Lew Burns, and telling them of all that had happened since they had last met. Buck Wesson, who had remained on guard at the camp would be told all this later.

The camp was cleverly concealed near the shore of the sluggish creek which was a raging torrent in the spring. Some freshet had excavated a large cave beneath the overhanging bank of the stream. Brush screened the approach. The place could not be found without considerable searching, and could be defended easily.

"Two of us will do a little trailin' in the mornin', and learn where that rider went," Bruce said, when he was at the camp resting beside the tiny fire.

"You loaf around here and let that leg heal," Buck Wesson ordered gruffly. "If Sam Ratch is in the neighborhood, we'll get him."

"I want to get him myself," Bruce said. "I'm rememberin' Dave. My leg's all right. I can ride."

"It might not have been Ratch or one of his men," Al Harley said. "The land grabbers have scouts out. Or it may have been some poor devil on a lone prowl, thinkin' he coud get hisself a fresh pony and new saddle."

"In about three days, we'll all ride over to Griffins," Bruce said. "It's only ten miles. We'll put in the day workin' and gettin' him straightened out. He can fix my leg again, if it needs it. We'll have a home-cooked meal. And we'll get a look at Dan Paley's camp. There was somethin' about him I didn't like. He'd turn bad with a little coaxin'."

"Suppose he does?" Lew Burns asked.

"It'd break Griffin all up, mebbe. The girl, too. Home folks, yuh know. They'd hate to think they'd brought him out here where he could be tempted."

"Yuh're shore a changed man since yuh stopped at that sod house," Al Harley declared.

"Yuh've got a feud on with Sam Ratch, and Marshal Malling thinks we might be the Prairie Wolf gang, and land grabbers are tryin' to find out what we're doin'," Buck Wesson grumbled. "And you want to do farm work for folks."

"It's that home-cooked meal," Lew Burns declared.

"The railroad hired us, and it wants to encourage and help settlers, doesn't it?" Bruce asked.

"Shore," Burns agreed. "'Specially settlers with young daughters who can cook. Fresh bread, real butter and apple pie! I'm ready to do farm work, Lem."

"Meanwhile, we'll have some sense and one of us will be on guard around this camp continual," Wesson said. "Sam Ratch is no gentleman, and he thinks killin' from ambush is a laughin' matter."

In the morning, Bruce took Al Harley with him and rode back over his trail of the night before. It was not difficult to find where the man who had shot at him had ridden along the edge of the grass.

Bruce dismounted and studied the hoofprints. They were small, like those made by a shod pony. And there was a peculiar bulge on the side of one of the shoes which would serve to identify the mount if Bruce ever encountered it.

He and Harley followed the tracks into the grass, and finally lost them there. It would be useless to follow them on, anyhow. After a mile or so, the rider could have turned in almost

any direction. Perhaps, Bruce thought, he had made for the distant hills. Ratch's hideout might be in the hills.

ON THE third morning following, Bruce appeared at the Griffin place with his three men. They came at dawn, just as Griffin was emerging from the sod house to do the morning chores. Lew Burns carried a string of fish. Buck Wesson had the carcass of an antelope across his saddle.

"Here's fresh meat and fish for you folks," Bruce told Griffin, after he had introduced his men to him and Elsie.

The girl had hurried from the house, carrying the shotgun, when she had heard voices.

"Now we'll do some work for yuh and get yuh straightened out some," Bruce went on. "After that, we're hopin' Miss Elsie will dish us up a real meal. I've been braggin' about her cookin'."

They brushed Griffin aside laughingly and went to work with Griffin's tools. He had plowed only a little of his fire-break, and Al Harley hitched the work team to the plow and started on that.

Bruce, Wesson and Burns cut sod and worked to complete the stable. They roofed it with a few planks left from the supply Griffin had brought with him, and with brush, and banked the roof with earth.

Then they began the excavation of a cyclone cellar near the house. The ground was soft, and the digging did not take long. At mid-day, they stopped to eat the meal Elsie had prepared. She had made antelope stew and cooked some of the fish, and had prepared fresh vegetables from the garden.

After the meal, the men returned to work and soon finished the cyclone cellar. The fire-break was not completed, but was left so it would not take Griffin long to finish it. Then Bruce and his men watered their horses and prepared to depart.

Griffin and Elsie tried to thank Bruce and his men.

"Think nothin' of it," Bruce said, laughing. "Can't one neighbor help another? Mebbe yuh can help me some time."

"If yuh've got a place where I can come and help whenever yuh need a man—" Griffin hinted.

"The whole prairie is our place," Bruce broke in. "I'm a prairie wolf, like I told yuh, and these gents are my pack. By the way, my leg's gettin' along fine. If yuh could spare me a little of that ointment—"

"I'll get you some," Elsie said.

Bruce went with her into the house while she filled a small jar with the ointment.

"Haven't seen Dan Paley around," Bruce hinted.

"He's over to his own place, I suppose. We—well, we had an argument. Dan's dissatisfied and wants to get away. That would wreck all Father's plans. He was depending on Dan to work the land adjoining. Father's getting old—"

"Dan's probably only restless," Bruce told her.

"Maybe he'll get over it. He's moping over at his own place like a boy."

Bruce and his men rode away a few minutes later. But when they were out of sight of the house, Bruce and Harley turned aside, kept to the low spots, and circled to Dan Paley's camp.

His covered wagon was there, and his work horses were grazing near a water-hole. Bruce saw the remains of a fire, and cooking utensils and dishes were scattered around, still soiled. The camp was far from being neat.

DAN PALEY was nowhere about. Bruce examined the tracks he could find, and drew in his breath sharply. At the same moment, Harley made the discovery.

"The man who shot at yuh has been here, Lem," Harley said. "Them shoe tracks—"

"I've noticed 'em. And Dan Paley has a pony."

"Why would he start gunnin' for yuh, a boy like him? Yuh never met him before that day, did yuh?"

"Never did," Bruce admitted. "I'll ask a few questions when I run across him again."

"Look here! Somebody's been here visitin'." Harley pointed. "Tracks of another hoss, and not made by either of that work team, either. They disappear into the grass. And where do yuh suppose this Dan Paley has gone?"

"Oh, mebbe out huntin' prairie chickens," Bruce replied. "He was here today, anyhow. The ashes of his fire are still warm. Let's ride and catch up with the others. Nothin' to do about this now. . . ."

Bruce and his men rested at their camp the next day. Their scouting work in this district was done. Dave Stephenson had brought a report to Bruce, but had died after giving him only a part of it. Bruce had written headquarters, telling of Dave's death and asking for full instructions and orders.

In a few days more, an answer would come to the settlement by stage. Bruce and his men would leave their camp here and ride in, and perhaps move on to another district.

However, Bruce had been thinking about stopping this scouting business. He had learned to like this country, and saw its possibilities. He and his men had choice parcels of land coming from the company if they wanted them, and Bruce had about decided to take his and settle down.

Buck Wesson cooked the evening meal that day, and after the men had eaten they began various duties. Buck mended a saddle. Lew Burns was trying to cut Al Harley's hair. Bruce swung up into his saddle and rode slowly down to the creek and along it, watching the flaming sunset.

He stopped for a moment to watch fish feeding in a pool at a bend in the creek, then rode on. The sunset disappeared, and dusk came. Bruce's horse tossed up his head and put his ears forward suddenly, and Bruce straightened in his saddle and dropped his hand to his holster.

A rider was emerging from the high grass only a short distance away. Bruce was about to swing back under cover when he saw that the rider was Elsie Griffin!

## CHAPTER IV

### *Into Ambush*

SPURRING toward Elsie, Lem Bruce called her name. She pulled up the work horse she was riding, and waited for him. As Bruce stopped beside her, he saw she was carrying the shotgun.

"Miss Elsie!" Bruce exclaimed. "Out here alone! Has somethin' happened at yore place? Do yuh need help?"

She was looking straight at him, and it was still light enough for Bruce to see that in her face was an expression of contempt.

"Where's Dan?" she demanded.

"Dan Paley?" Bruce asked. "Why, I don't know anything about him."

"You don't have to lie to me now. I know everything."

"About what?" Bruce asked, puzzled.

"Was it necessary for you to ruin the life of a boy like Dan? Maybe he *was* homesick and restless, but he wouldn't have turned bad unless he'd been tempted."

"I'm afraid yuh'll have to explain all this," Bruce told her. "I don't know what yuh're talkin' about, Miss Elsie."

"I understand everything," she said. "That first day you came to our place you talked to Dan a long time when you were getting ready to leave.

When you and your men came and did all that work, you asked about Dan. That work! We wondered why you were so kind. Now we know."

"Suppose yuh tell me," Bruce suggested.

"Marshal Malling was by our place. He's looking for the Prairie Wolf, the man who calls himself Sam Ratch—and maybe some other things. We told him about you. And he says you're Sam Ratch, and the reason you did all that work was because you're intending to move in later and make our place your winter quarters."

"Joe Mallin's shore got a good imagination," Bruce said.

"If you're an outlaw, I don't care. It's none of my business. But I do care about Dan."

"What about Dan?"

"Is it necessary for me to tell you? You've coaxed him to join your band. You've made an outlaw out of him. We found a note fastened to the door this morning. Dan left it—said he was quitting, turning over everything but his pony to my Father, that he was going to have some life and excitement. It'll mean a rope or bullet for him in the end."

"But I don't know anything—" Bruce began.

"You don't have to pretend with me. You can tell the truth. Maybe you just don't understand. It's not that I'm in love with Dan or want to marry him. I never would. I know he's a weakling. I've always known it. That's why I wouldn't marry him before we started out here. But I don't want to see him an outlaw. Father feels responsible, because he got Dan to come here. So I slipped away on one of the horses and trailed here, trying to find you. Send Dan away, that's all I want."

"Miss Elsie, yuh've got to believe me," Bruce said. "I haven't seen Dan Paley since that day at yore place. I don't know anything about him. Mebbe he's just ridden to the settlement."

"The note he left was plain enough. He said he was going to change his name and join outlaws. He seemed proud of it."

"He hasn't joined me, and I'm not an outlaw," Bruce said.

"That marshal, Malling, says you are. He's got men out searching for you. He says you're Sam Ratch, the Prairie Wolf."

"Ratch would shoot me at sight, as I would him, because he killed my friend," Bruce said. "Mebbe I've done some things to make the marshal suspicious, but I'm not Ratch, and not an outlaw."

"Who are you, then, and what are you and your men doing?"

"I can't tell yuh that now. There are reasons."

"Oh, you can't?"

THE tone of her voice told Bruce what she was thinking.

"Ratch and his gang must be somewheres in the neighborhood, mebbe lookin' for me while they're dodgin' the marshal's posse," Bruce explained. "If Dan's joined outlaws, he's joined Ratch. Mebbe I'd better tell yuh a couple of things."

"I'm listening," she said.

"The first time I was at yore place and talked with Dan Paley, he did some hintin' about outlaws. And after I'd ridden away, he followed and tried to shoot me."

"Dan did? Why, that couldn't be true! Why should he?"

"He thought I was Sam Ratch, prob'ly. He'd mentioned to me that there was a reward for Ratch, dead or alive. I was fired at from the grass, and the next day I found hoofprints. And the day we done that work at yore place, I visited Paley's camp later, and found the same hoofprints there—Paley's pony. And there was other prints. He'd had a visitor. It's possible Sam Ratch dropped in on him."

"I can't believe Dan would try to kill a man for money."

"Oh, mebbe he had the idea he'd be helpin' the Law. And the reward would come in mighty handy, too. Mebbe he thought he'd make hisself a reputation, and take the money and travel."

"I wish I could believe you," she said. "Why don't you make that possible? Tell me why you and your men are riding around the prairie."

"Not now," Bruce said. "You'd better be gettin' home. The moon will be up pretty quick, but yuh shouldn't be ridin' around the prairie alone. Yore father will be worryin'. Did yuh follow our tracks to the creek?"

"Yes."

"I'll show yuh a short cut home, then. Them tracks was left purposely so's an enemy would come at us the way we'd want him to."

He rode side by side with her along the edge of the rustling grass. Neither spoke for a time. Then she broke the silence.

"So you think Dan was trying to kill you for reward money? How much is offered for Sam Ratch?"

"Twenty-five hundred, dead or alive. The stage-coach company posted it. Marshal Malling is shore workin' hard to get it."

"And you're not Sam Ratch?"

"Do I have to tell yuh that again?" Bruce asked. "Tell yuh what I'll do. I'll try to run across Ratch and his gang. I've got somethin' to settle with him, like I told yuh. If I find Dan, I'll try to make him understand the mistake he's makin', and send him home."

"I expect you can find him easily enough," she said.

"Yuh don't believe me yet," Bruce told her. "I'm sorry." He stopped his horse, and she stopped beside him. "See that big hump of land in the moonlight? Make straight for that, then bear to the left, and yuh'll soon be home."

She looked straight at him as she gathered her reins.

"Thanks for showing me the way," she told him.

She kicked at the horse's flanks and rode away with greater speed than was necessary. Bruce wheeled his horse to go back. Guns cracked suddenly from a spot off to his left, and slugs sang past his head.

"Get him!" a man howled. "The girl's led him to us!"

AS BRUCE jumped his horse into thicker grass, those words were ringing in his ears. Could it be possible that Elsie Griffin had decoyed him to a spot where he might be killed? Had there been some point to all her talk about how much reward was offered for Sam Ratch, dead or alive? Had she really believed he was Ratch and had led him into an ambush?

He had picked this route, but that made little difference. If men had been trailing her, they could have followed when Bruce had started out to show her the short way home.

His own gun barked at a distant shadow. He could make out that two men were trying to get him. And suddenly he heard the wild, welcome shrill yell of one of his own men, and Buck Wesson came riding madly toward him with his gun spitting flame and lead.

Bruce wheeled his horse again to meet Buck, answering his yell. But their two foes did not wait to give combat. They fired again, then swung away through the grass. Bruce and Buck Wesson stopped. To give chase might be to ride into an ambush. The enemy would be lost in the shadows, anyhow.

"Thought I'd hit my saddle and follow yuh, Lem," Wesson said. "It's plumb lucky I did. I was goin' to talk about our ride to the settlement. Saw yuh ridin' with that girl, but kept back because I thought that might be yore personal business. So she decoyed yuh, huh?"

"I can't believe it," Bruce said. "I think they just followed her, thinkin' she might be comin' to me."

"And why did she, if it's any of my business?"

"She thinks I'm Ratch, and that young Dan Paley has joined our gang. Yuh know what that means? He's joined up with Ratch, and Ratch is in the neighborhood. The marshal's around, too."

"We'd better be gettin' out of here," Wesson said.

"We'll hit for the settlement tomorrow," Bruce told him. "Our work here is done. And I want to see if there's a letter from the company."

They rode back to the camp and stretched out around the campfire, talking of breaking camp in the morning and making for the settlement. It was at least three hours later when Lew Burns, going for water, saw the pink sky and called to the others.

They rushed out from beneath the overhanging bank to see the red sky quickly growing brighter, and the thick black billows of smoke ascending, with amber flames licking through them.

"That's a bad one, Lem," Buck Wesson said. "Looks like it was spreadin' fast, too."

"Bound to spread fast in this wind," Bruce judged.

"It may get to that Griffin place," Lew Burns said.

"And it may mean trouble aside from the flames themselves," Bruce added. "Mebbe that fire didn't just accidentally happen. Let's ride!"

They rushed to catch up their horses and saddle them, and to fill canteens and get other things they needed. They looked to their guns and supplies of ammunition, then started.

They rode along the creek over the rough ground with what speed they could safely, came to the grass and rode through it wildly as it whipped and tore at them and their mounts. They could see that the fire was growing and spreading, racing over the dry prairie, driven by the stiff wind.

After what seemed to them a long time, they got upon higher ground, and Bruce could estimate the situation as they pulled up their horses to give them a short breathing spell.

"They may be needin' help at the Griffin place," Bruce said. "Griffin may not know how to handle this. We'll ride to Griffin's and see if we can help."

"And mebbe learn the truth about a few things," Buck Wesson added.

BRUCE led the way as they traveled on. The other three kept close behind him. They could catch the odor of the smoke now, though the wind was blowing away from them, and the horses began acting nervous. As they came to another patch of high ground, Bruce could see the wall of fire beyond Griffin's place, and new fires starting on either side of it.

"They won't know how to backfire —they'll be doin' it wrong!" Bruce shouted to his men. "Better use yore spurs!"

They dashed on through the waving grass, each man risking a bad spill. They could see that the flames already were licking at the fire-break on three sides of Griffin's place. Only the side on which Bruce and his men were approaching remained black. And Bruce thought he could see somebody starting to use a torch there.

Bruce began shouting, and the men behind him added their howls of warning. The wind swept their voices down upon the man using the torch. They charged on—and suddenly were met by a blast of gunfire.

A bullet knocked Bruce's hat from his head as his horse madly carried him on. His men began shouting again. Bruce could see three men by the fire-break, and it was light enough for him to see that Griffin was not one of them.

"We've ridden into trouble!" Bruce shouted. "Take care of yoreselves! Round 'em up!"

## CHAPTER V

### *In the Midst of Flames*

MORE bullets flicked past them as they rode, but none hit home. They came to the plowed ground of the fire-break, and had to slow down to cross it. They could see three men running toward the sod house, and they reached it as Bruce and his men got across the fire-break and made for the protection of the sod stable.

They could see three saddled horses tied to a post near the corner of the house, plunging and pulling at their reins in a fury of fear at the fire. Bruce led his men in a mad dash behind the stable, and opened the back door. Inside were four work horses and the cow. There was room for no more.

"We'll tie our ponies here," Bruce said, as he started to dismount. "Have yore guns ready. There's somethin' funny here. I haven't seen either Griffin or his daughter. And them three hosses—"

His men were dismounting and tying their horses to a piece of timber which projected from the wall of the stable. Bruce looked around quickly. The corn, almost ripened, would be smoking soon, then bursting into flame, if the fire spread much nearer it. The stock in the stable would be all right unless the animals suffered from smoke.

"Look, Bruce!" one of the men called.

He was pointing to the cyclone cellar. Griffin's head was showing there, and Elsie's came up beside it.

"I'll get to them and find out about this," Bruce told his men. "Keep yore eyes on the house and shoot any man who comes out."

Holding his gun ready, Bruce bent half double and started sprinting across the rough ground toward the cyclone cellar, shouting his identity to Griffin. Somebody in the house fired from a window, and the bullet passed close to Bruce. He stumbled, got into his stride again and raced on, to dart panting into the cellar.

Griffin and Elsie were crouching there, fear pictured in their faces.

"What's happened?" Bruce demanded. "Talk quick!"

"Sam Ratch—the Prairie Wolf," Griffin stammered. "He came—"

"He's here now?" Bruce asked.

"In the house, with two other men. Marshal Malling and a posse were chasin' 'em. They started the fire to keep the posse back."

"We saw men run into the house as we rode up," Bruce said. "We'll get 'em out of there. Sam Ratch is the man I want! He killed my pardner durin' that stage hold-up. Ratch and his killers—"

So far, he had not spoken a word to the girl. Now she clutched at his sleeve.

"Please forgive me," she said. "I know everything now. That is—I know you're not Sam Ratch, and that Dan hasn't been with you."

"Yuh're forgiven," Bruce said. "We'll talk later. You folks keep back in here. I'll get over to my men, and we'll settle Sam Ratch and the fellers with him."

"Dan is with him," Elsie said.

"The boy turned bad," Griffin added. "He came ridin' in with Ratch and the other man, with a posse after 'em."

"Mebbe he hasn't done anything criminal yet," Bruce said. "If he hasn't, we might save him."

"If I can help—" Griffin said.

"Yuh'll help most by stayin' right here and takin' care of Miss Elsie. Don't come out till we've handled these men."

Bruce left the cellar and started running back to the stable. The swirls of smoke probably saved him from the bullets sent winging their

way toward him from the house. He reached his men safely, and gave quick orders.

They left the protection of the stable, two from either side of it, and ran zigzag fashion through the swirling smoke toward the sod house. Red flashes appeared in the rear window, and the back door was opened and somebody fired from it. But the shots all missed, and Bruce and his men ran on.

They reached the house safely, and crouched beside the wall where they could not be made targets from either the door or the windows.

"Come out of there!" Bruce shouted to those inside. "If yuh don't, we'll burn yuh out!"

He got no answer. Buck Wesson crept carefully to the corner of the house and fired at the door. Al Harley went around to the front, keeping low against the wall.

"Come out, Sam Ratch!" Bruce shouted.

The smoke was getting thicker as it swirled around them. The heat was becoming intense. Bruce imagined that those in the sod house were commencing to feel it.

Bruce wanted to make an end of this, so they could wet blankets at the well, use them over their heads for protection, and drench the walls of the house and stable with water. There was a lot of quick work to be done if the Griffin place was not to be wiped out.

"Riders comin', Bruce!" Al Harley shouted. "Mebbe it's the marshal with a posse."

Inside the house, Sam Ratch heard that. A moment later, he came charging out, Dan Paley and another man with him. Ratch was the first to reach the horses. As he jerked at the reins of his mount, Dan Paley and the other man rushed toward their mounts.

Guns barked. Lew Burns toppled and sank to the ground. The strange man with Ratch tossed up his arms as he started to mount. He fell and sprawled lifelessly. Sam Ratch was in the saddle, but his frenzied horse was wheeling and dancing out of control. Dan Paley ran to his pony, then seemed to hesitate.

It was a bullet from Sam Ratch's gun that struck Paley and knocked him down. Then Ratch jumped his horse forward and started toward the fire-break in the only place where there was no fire beyond, screeching at Paley for quitting.

Bruce ran out away from the swirl of smoke, aimed carefully and fired. Sam Ratch's body jerked, then he toppled out of the saddle. His horse ran madly on.

"See to him!" Bruce shouted to Buck Wesson. "Careful! Mebbe he's only wounded."

He shouted to Al Harley to look after Lew Burns, and ran himself to where Dan Paley was sprawled and trying to get up.

"Don't shoot me—don't shoot me!" Paley whimpered. "I thought you was Ratch—wanted the reward—"

"Yuh've got it," Bruce said, as he noticed the wound. "Yuh made a fool play, Paley."

"I was just ridin' with Ratch. When we ran into the posse, I didn't even shoot at 'em. And Ratch tried to kill me!"

"Keep quiet about it," Bruce warned. "Say nothin' about bein' with Ratch. I'll see that nobody else talks about it. Let 'em think yuh was helpin' defend the place. Mallin' is comin' with some men."

LEM BRUCE left him and hurried toward the cyclone cellar, shouting for Griffin and Elsie to come out. He met them a short distance from the cellar.

"Careful what yuh say about Paley," he warned. "I've talked to him. A wild young fool, but this will be the turnin' point for him—if he lives."

"If he lives?" Griffin echoed.

"He's bad hurt and don't realize it.

Let the marshal think he was helpin' defend the place. Now, get blankets and soak 'em at the well. We've got to work fast!"

Malling and his possemen were coming cautiously, and Bruce waved his arms at them and shouted for them to hurry. The marshal led the way across the fire-break.

"There's Sam Ratch!" Bruce howled at the marshal, pointing. "One of his men, too. Both dead. We've got to fight the fire here, and—"

"Not so fast!" Malling shouted. "Who are you?"

"Lem Bruce, railroad company scout. These men work with me. I'll explain later. Let's get busy."

Paley and Lew Burns were put aside to receive attention later, and the others went to work. They soaked blankets and sheets and draped them over their heads. They carried water and drenched the walls of the house and stable nearest the fire. They backfired along one stretch, tore away a couple of rows of corn which had started smoking, and saved the rest.

The fire near at hand was dying out. But, miles away, the flames still raced before the wind. All around the Griffin place was blackened land. But the grass would grow again in the spring. And the danger was over.

The stock had been saved. The top had burned off one of the wagons, but that was the only damage to them. The chickens were running around squawking. A corner of the thatched roof of the stable had caught from the heat, but the fire had been extinguished. That was the scene the dawn revealed.

Lew Burns' wound had been dressed, and he would be all right. But Dan Paley was unconscious, and would not live.

Weeping, Elsie went into the house to prepare coffee and food for the men. Griffin hung around Bruce. His report to the marshal had been brief:

"That man who called hisself Sam Ratch came here and said a posse was after him, and that he'd set the fire to keep 'em away. Then Mr. Bruce and his men come and fought 'em. They'd made me and my daughter get into the cyclone cellar, so we didn't see much. I—I guess Dan done all he could."

Malling took it for granted that Paley had been helping the Griffins. He said Ratch's band had been scattered and that he believed all were now dead. Then he looked at Bruce.

"I've got credentials here, and yuh can read 'em, Marshal," Bruce said. "I've been scoutin' for the railroad company, as I told yuh. Couldn't do any talkin' because it was bein' kept a secret where the new railroad's to run."

"Can yuh do any talkin' now?" the marshal asked.

"A little. Dave Stephenson, shot by Ratch durin' the stage-coach hold-up, was a friend of mine and also a confidential man for the railroad company. He was bringin' me information and orders. He talked some before he died. I'm on my way to the settlement now to get an official letter. My work here is done. The surveyors will be here soon. I'm goin' to take up land and start a whale of a farm."

"Take up land where?" Malling asked.

BRUCE grinned. "Around here. I'll let yuh in on the secret, but don't spread the news yet. We don't want the wrong people to learn it. I get five square miles for my work, and each of my men gets the same. Mr. Griffin done a good thing for himself when he settled here."

"The road will run near here?" Malling asked eagerly.

"About five miles south of this place. And if the company follows my recommendation there'll be a town close, because good water can be obtained a few feet down. Turn in yore badge, Marshal, and take up land."

Elsie called them to eat. When they had finished, they found

that Dan Paley had died without regaining consciousness. They buried him on a knoll about half a mile from the sod house. A short time afterward, the marshal and his possemen rode away, with the bodies of Sam Ratch and the other dead outlaw lashed across their own saddles.

Lew Burns had only a shoulder wound, and was strong enough now to wander outside the house with Griffin, to look around the place. Bruce was left alone with Elsie.

"You're really going to take up land and stay around here?" she asked.

"That's right," Bruce said. "I'm goin' to take land adjoinin' yore father's. It's fine soil hereabouts, with good water close to the surface. I hope I'll be seein' a lot of yuh."

"I—I hope so, too. But, after me believing you were an outlaw—"

"Shucks! I reckon I did act some suspicious, ridin' around with other men and never statin' my business."

Bruce put his arm around her, and she did not resist. He looked down at her, pulled her closer to him.

"Prairie wolf!" she said. Her eyes were misty, but she was smiling.

•

*Accused of a Brutal Murder, Lance Harding Battles for Justice and Vindication in*

# GUNS OF ROARING RIVER

*A Quick-Trigger Action Novelet*

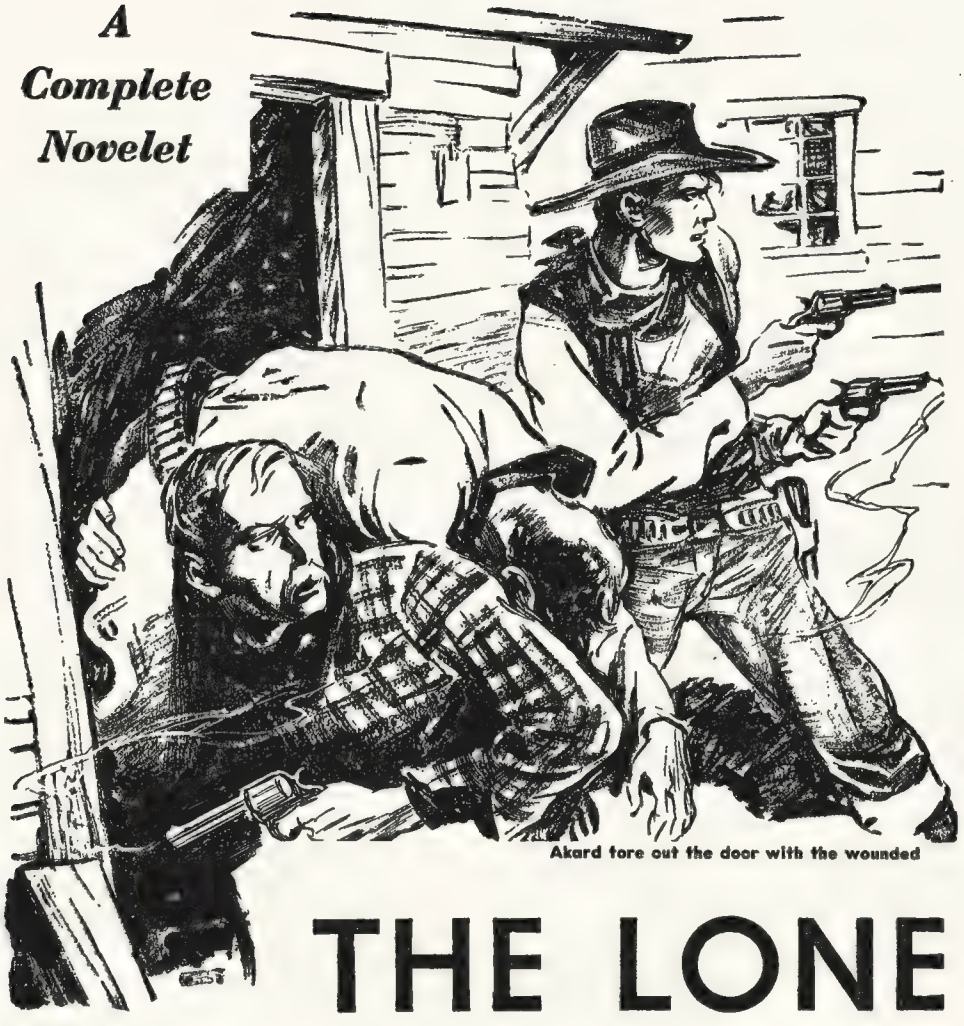
## By WILTON WEST

*COMING NEXT ISSUE*

•

For easy shaves that please the eye
Long-lasting Thin Gillette's the buy!
You make a saving that is real . . .
And think how grand you look and feel!
NOW SHOWING
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
4 for 10c
8 for 19c
12 for 27c
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade
Easy Way To Get Even More Shaves With Every Gillette Blade
1. WASH FACE thoroughly with hot water and soap to soften beard and eliminate accumulated grit that dulls shaving edges
2. APPLY LATHER or brushless shaving cream while face is wet. If lather is used, work it in well with brush or fingers
3. TWO EDGES double blade life. Marks indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves
4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges

*A Complete Novelet*



Akard tore out the door with the wounded

# THE LONE

## CHAPTER I

### *Tragedy of Gun Law*

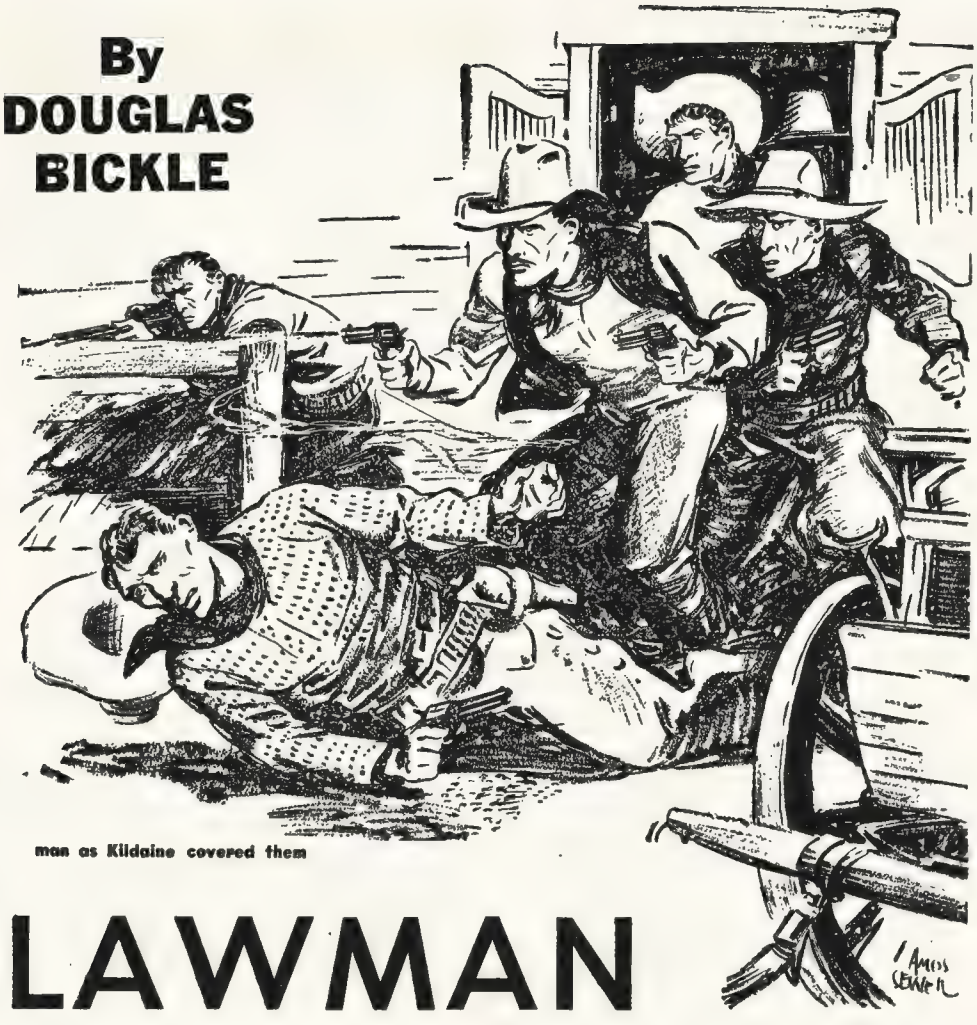
AN EAR-SPLITTING crash of thunder lashed through the rain driving over the frame buildings fronting the canal of mud that was the main street of Tres Pasos. Inside the Purple Palace Saloon where a bawdy crowd laughed, fought, danced and gambled, rank odors of sweat, wet sawdust and spilled liquor tainted the smoky air.

Sheriff Brady Kildaine stood at the long bar, his wide shoulders slouched as he contemplated the glass of whiskey before him. He was tall and lean and young, with slow humor softening his blue eyes, and a lazy, confident smile usually was on his lips. But he took his job seriously.

A huge man in a rain-spattered Stetson uptilted above a laughter-wrinkled face moved up to him and slapped his back. He was "Slugger" London, ex-sailor, jack-of-all-trades,

Kildaine Tackles Grim Problems When He

By
DOUGLAS
BICKLE



man as Kildaine covered them

# LAWMAN

but now in the cattle business, and foreman of Brady's father's spread.

"Nice goin', Brady," he complimented with a wide grin, "the way yuh handled that 'breed!"

The sheriff grinned. London was referring to his quick dispatch of Pelo Castron, deadly 'breed killer sent by Dart Jardeen of the Shamrock Belle Saloon to create a disturbance in the Purple Palace and shoo more business to his place. Just a few minutes before, Castron had blasted down a lamp, raked a stream of gunfire across a row of whiskey bottles behind the bar, and announced that the Purple Palace was closing.

Brady Kildaine had walked up to him, kicked the smoking six-gun from his swarthy fist, then cracked him hard on the jaw. As the killer had come up cursing, Kildaine had hurled him through the swing doors into the muddy street.

Pelo Castron had gone to jail vowing vengeance, but business continued

## Brings Roaring Gun Justice to Tres Pasos!

as usual in the Purple Palace.

Brady suddenly straightened as he saw, reflected in the bottle-framed mirror, the girl who had just entered the place. He jerked around in the sudden hush, a frowning question in his eyes. The girl who stood hesitantly just inside the door was lovely, the lamp light dancing in her tawny hair, and raindrops sparkling on her soft cheeks. The yellow slicker she clutched close failed to conceal the curves of her shapely young body.

FACING the gawking humanity in that hole, she was as out of place as a delicate flower in a garbage can. Though she was striving to retain her composure, Kildaine discerned the raw panic in her dark eyes.

As she saw him, momentary relief erased the strain on her face.

"Sheila!" he said reprovingly, as he reached her. "What in heaven's name are you doin' here?"

"I had to find you, Brady!" she choked. "It's happened!"

The young sheriff hurried her outside. "What's happened, Sheila?"

"Your dad—and mine," she told him breathlessly, "have met in the Shamrock Belle. Oh, Brady! Hurry before they kill each other!"

As they stared at each other searchingly, the same alarming thought was in their minds. Whatever the outcome, what effect would this have on the marriage they planned?

"Go home, Sheila," Kildaine told her quietly. "Stay there."

With a last glance at him she hesitantly started off. Brady Kildaine headed down the rain-swept, muddy boardwalk for the Shamrock Belle.

Swift memory of the feud between "Black John" Kildaine, his father, and Sam Fillmore, Sheila's father, urged him to a run. That feud had started six months before when Sam Fillmore had begun relentlessly expanding his holdings in Osage Basin and Black John had questioned Fillmore's methods.

There had been rustling raids on small ranches throughout the Basin and the ranchers had been sunk after they had lost their cows, or had their homes burned. And Sam Fillmore had taken advantage of their misfortunes, buying what was left of the ranches, though no one except Black John had believed Fillmore responsible for the original losses. Once the sheriff had been in a running fight with the rustlers and had killed two. But they had not been known in Osage Basin, and had been buried unidentified.

But Black John had given his opinion of Fillmore in such strong language that a gun duel had been narrowly averted. And when Black John himself began losing cattle and fine horses he had openly blamed Fillmore. There was bound to be a showdown—and now it had come.

Tongued lightning ran across the murky heavens, and crashing thunder pealed as Brady reached the Shamrock Belle. As he pushed through the crowd, falling back from the long bar, only the tense breathing of excited men broke the death-pregnant hush.

Stark tragedy was in the making. Under the swinging lamps Black John Kildaine and Sam Fillmore faced each other with deadly intent.

The black, flat-crowned Stetson of Black John Kildaine, the sheriff's arrogant, hard-bitten father, was uptilted to reveal the slitted black eyes and hard mouth in his scowling, rugged face. Beneath his black frock coat showed the coal-black butt of his .45.

Huge Sam Fillmore, bay-windowed and also frock-coated, with heavy jowls, arrogant lips, and shrewd little eyes, possessed an uncanny skill with a six-gun. His heavy hand was inching toward the pearl-handled six-gun in his holster.

Any moment now guns would crash, and one of those old warriors would fall dead.

"Hold off on the gunplay, yuh hellions!" The sheriff leaped forward. "I've warned yuh both—"

"Keep out of this, son!" Black John Kildaine flung at him, never flickering his slitted stare. "You ain't done nothin' about this thievin' range hog. Now I'm settlin' with him personal!"

"Start settlin', John!" Fillmore boomed. "Draw—or show yeller!"

Sweat broke out on the sheriff's face, and he eased toward Fillmore. This had gone too far. Only death would end it now. With a hang-rope awaiting the man left alive!

Black John was cool-nerved, fast, and a dead shot, but he could never match Fillmore's uncanny speed, the sheriff knew. Yet to save his own father's life, Brady's only alternative was to gun down the father of the girl he loved!

Everyone in the barroom was as motionless as staring wax figures. Suddenly a dance-hall girl gave a whimpering, broken cry and hid her eyes. Brady Kildaine was near Fillmore now.

"Don't come no closer, Brady!" Fillmore warned tightly.

And as if that were a cue, with amazing swiftness, young Kildaine threw himself directly in front of Fillmore. Fillmore's beefy hand flashed by his holster. The sheriff's own hand swept toward his hip. A blasting roar brought sharp cries from the crowd.

The sheriff felt the swish of a bullet past his ear, and "Big Sam" Fillmore staggered backward, a look of surprise on his florid face! Still trying to snatch his gun, he sank to the floor. Blood began spilling from his left shoulder.

"Black John gunned Sam!" a man blurted aghast.

Brady Kildaine whirled, gun drawn, sick with the knowledge he would have to arrest his own father! But Black John was striding forward, his gun still in its holster, bewilderment on his scowling face.

Somewhere a woman screamed. Then a hoarse cry filled the room.

"Let me though! Curse yuh, let me through!"

Fighting, swearing, with terrible emotion in his weak face, Chet Fillmore broke through the crowd, dropped to his knees beside his father, staring at the blood soaking Sam Fillmore's coat with horror-filled eyes.

"Dad!" he moaned. "I didn't mean to shoot yuh! I was shootin' at that cussed sheriff when I seen him goin' for his gun! I only meant to save yuh, Dad!"

"Can yuh tie that?" a nearby man marveled. "Chet shot his old man!"

Brady Kildaine examined Fillmore's wound. The bullet, apparently had narrowly missed a lung. Fillmore was conscious, but in pain, and bleeding badly. Chet turned bloodshot eyes on the sheriff.

"Curse yuh, Killdaine!" he snarled. "This is all yore fault!"

Young Kildaine stood up, hard-eyed, as someone fought through the crowd with round-faced, bald-headed, stubble-bearded little Doc Magruder. Sheila was with him, staring aghast at her father.

"Dad!" she cried, but Doc Magruder motioned her away. She pressed close to Brady Kildaine, the blood draining from her face. In a stricken voice she said, "They—they say that Chet—"

KILDAINE nodded, trying to mask his own dread. Because of his badge and because of his oath, he would have to do something in a moment that would hurt Sheila terribly. But even as he felt her shuddering against him, he knew he could not do otherwise.

The doctor had stopped the bleeding of Sam Fillmore's wound, but ordered him removed to his office immediately. Chet and several men helped Fillmore to his feet. Sheriff Kildaine stepped before Chet.

"Just a minute, Chet," he said tonelessly. "Let them other fellers help

yore dad. Yuh're under arrest."

Chet flushed with rage. "What the devil do yuh mean, Kildaine?" he demanded furiously.

"What I said, Chet."

"Don't be loco, Kildaine!" the elder Fillmore growled, his deep voice edged with pain. "Think I'm goin' to file charges against my own boy?"

Sheriff Kildaine's eyes were unrelenting. "You don't have to."

"What yuh mean?" Fillmore roared.

"I'm holdin' Chet for attempted murder."

The sheriff heard Sheila's sharp intake of breath. And Chet's friends were gathering and might make trouble.

"Cuss yuh, Kildaine!" shouted Sam Fillmore. "Yuh're doin' this to help yore old man fight me! But yuh won't get away with it!"

"That's a lie!" Black John shouted.

"Chet meant that bullet for my back," young Kildaine pointed out.

At Sheila's stricken cry, he faced her, more hurt than she by what he was forced to bring upon her.

"The law is the law, Sheila," he said simply, though with all his heart he wished he could relieve her anguish.

Suddenly she gave a warning scream.

"Chet, *don't!*"

"Look out, Brady!" a man yelled shrilly. "Behind yuh!"

The sheriff whirled, Chet snarled rasping in his ears, "This bullet'll go where the other was meant!" Brady Kildaine raked out his own gun, slashed down. The blow smashed Chet to the floor.

Black John was siding his son as the sheriff jerked the dazed Chet to his feet.

"Yuh'll pay for sluggin' my boy, Kildaine!" Sam Fillmore shouted harshly.

"Get Sam out of here," Doc Magruder snapped, "before he goes to bleedin' again."

Sheila was before Brady Kildaine, her eyes mirroring a torrent of emotion. She winced at the sight of her brother's torn scalp.

"Did—did you have to do that, Brady?" she asked dully.

"It was him, or me, Sheila," he told her quietly.

"But you can't charge him with attempted murder, Brady!" she pleaded piteously.

"I have no choice, Sheila," he said, and pain was in his own voice. "If he was my own brother, I'd do the same."

He saw she couldn't understand. After all, Chet *was* her brother.

"All right, Brady," she said, in a tightly controlled voice. "If that is the way it is to be—then it will be."

Chin high and shoulders straight, she turned and walked after her father.

## CHAPTER II

### *Duty—and Treachery*

IGNORING the challenging stares of Chet's friends, Brady Kildaine prodded Chet Fillmore outside into the rain and up to jail. Black John followed them inside, and stood silently while the sheriff patched up Chet's gashed head, then locked him in a back cell opposite Pelo Castron, the 'breed killer. Chet fixed him with a dull, threatening, stare, and gripped his cell bars hard.

"You was lucky tonight, Kildaine!" he sneered. "But next time yore luck won't be so good!"

"I keel heem, too," Pelo Castron chimed in. "Jus' wait. I keel that law hombre." Castron's white teeth glistened in the glow of his cigarette, and there was savage menace in his tone.

As Brady Kildaine started toward the office he was recalling that he'd had a serious talk with Chet not long before, trying to impress on him the

heartbreak he was causing Sheila. It had been futile. Chet cared for nothing but the wild life of the saloon crowd. Perhaps Chet's father was most to blame, for he had kept Chet well supplied with money, but dangerously without restriction.

In the office, Black John was smoking a black cigar and looking worried.

"I think yuh just done a plumb fool thing, Brady," Black John said soberly. "Much as I hate Sam Fillmore and that whiskey-soaked son of his, I don't forget Sheila's a plumb thoroughbred. They don't turn out many gals like her. And—well, I'd shore hate to see yuh lose her on account of her no-good brother."

The sheriff's wide shoulders slumped slightly, as he faced his hard-bitten father.

"I'm hopin' she'll see things different. Anyhow, the folks who elected me to this office are entitled to a square deal. I can't turn the law on and off to suit myself. I'd arrested you, Dad, if yuh'd shot Sam Fillmore."

Black John stiffened. "I believe yuh would've *tried* it," he corrected.

Brady Kildaine did not argue. He loved Sheila deeply and had been impatiently awaiting their marriage. But duty was duty.

Inwardly cursing the fate that could force a man to hurt the one he loved most, he sat on the edge of the desk and looked at Black John.

"How'd yuh come to tangle with Sam tonight, Dad?"

Black John scowled. "It's like I been tellin' yuh all along, son," he growled. "There's only one hombre behind these rustlin' raids, and he's Sam Fillmore! Yuh ain't done nothin' to stop him so I intend to. I'm losin' cattle and hosses!"

"Yuh got no proof it was Sam."

"Bah!" Black John snorted, and began pacing the floor. "Sam's guilty, all right, him and that slinkin' son of his. And I'll tell yuh somebody else who's got a finger in the pie. Dart Jardeen—'New York lawyer' he calls hisself. Soon as he come to town a year ago he got thick with Sam and Chet. He bought the Shamrock Belle, and he's got hired gunnies. He run for sheriff against you. Nobody fought yore election harder than them Fillmores and Dart Jardeen. Anyhow, who's grabbin' up all the ranches that are raided? Sam is! What more proof do yuh want?"

"That ain't proof," the sheriff snapped impatiently. "Men are tried and convicted by juries now, Dad, not strung to the nearest cottonwood by cowmen. Mebbe them three are guilty, but yuh'd never convict 'em by yore line of reasonin'. Yuh need proof—and plenty of it."

BLACK JOHN rammed his cigar into his mouth, clamped his lips stubbornly.

"That may be, Brady," he agreed harshly, "but there ain't nothin' like a lynchin' or a little gunsmoke to restore law and order to a range!"

"Those days are gone, Dad," young Kildaine said flatly. "And don't overlook the law against gun-fightin' in this town."

Black John grimaced helplessly. Then he looked at his son again, a light of hope in his eyes.

"Brady, some day my ranch will fall into yore hands. Why don't yuh give up this fool sheriffin' and come back to the ranch now? Come on, boy, and bring Sheila as yore bride before it's too late."

"It ain't as simple as that, Dad," the sheriff's son said ruefully.

Black John sighed helplessly. "There's always two ways of lookin' at a thing, reckon. Yuh're just like yore mother. She never broke a trust in her life. Yuh never will either, prob'ly."

Black John opened the door and stepped outside into the stormy night. Brady Kildaine sat down and rolled a smoke. He couldn't keep his mind off Sheila, wondering what this night

would do to their happiness. Presently the door flung open and a man rushed inside, excitement in his stubble-bearded face.

"Some of Chet's friends over to the Shamrock Belle, Sheriff," the man blurted, "are talkin' of freein' Chet!"

Young Kildaine put on his hat, went outside. As he crossed the street between the jail and the Shamrock Belle, he involuntarily threw a glance down the dark street toward Sam Fillmore's town house. Fillmore would get well and his feud with Black John would continue—until one of them was dead.

Halfway across the street, a high-pitched scream reached his ears. He stiffened, recognizing that scream. Sheila!

The sheriff turned off the deserted main street and raced for the Fillmore house. Reaching it, he jerked the front door open. At the end of the hall he saw a sliver of light under a door, and rushed to it.

Gripping his six-gun, he pushed inside. Then he stopped cold, too late realizing his mistake!

"Don't draw, Kildaine," Sam Fillmore lashed at him from a bed. "And don't holler for help. Take his gun, Sheila."

Kildaine stared into the big muzzle of the uptilted .45 in Fillmore's beefy fist. Then a slow smile twitched at his lips.

"Not a bad trick, Sam," he drawled. "Only it ain't goin' to work."

"No?" Fillmore mocked. "Stay a spell and see!"

The searching eyes were upon Sheila as she lifted Kildaine's gun from its holster with hands that shook. She wouldn't meet his gaze, obviously fighting to conceal her emotions. But he would not ask her why she had done this thing.

Fillmore's taunting laugh broke into his disturbed thoughts.

"Yuh made a mistake jailin' my boy, Kildaine. Yuh're gettin' a mite big for yore hat."

"You realize, of course," the sheriff countered levelly, "that yuh're makin' Sheila an accessory to jail-break."

"How yuh figger that?" Fillmore demanded.

"She screamed, knowin' I'd come, leavin' the jail so's Chet's friends can free him."

Sam Fillmore grinned. "Prove that, Kildaine!" he challenged.

THEN, in the silence that followed, came distant sounds that made Kildaine's blood boil. A volley of muffled gunshots. A short interval and another prolonged blast of gunfire. After that a cheer.

The sheriff's gaze went from father to daughter. And the same thought went unspoken between the three.

Chet was free!

Sheila sank into a chair near the window, and dropped her eyes to the floor. Kildaine knew what she was going through, but said nothing.

Then he heard the front door open, heard footsteps in the hall. Chet, he guessed.

There was a soft knock. Sheila arose, replaced Brady's unloaded six-gun in its holster. Fillmore slid his own gun under the bed clothes, but the sheriff knew it was still pointed at his chest.

"Come in!" Fillmore bawled.

The door opened and a man stepped inside. It wasn't Chet. It was Dart Jardeen, the stocky, square-shouldered owner of the Shamrock Belle. Impeccably dressed in a black frock coat and white silk shirt, and with his blocky, granite jaw clean shaven around a cropped mustache, Jardeen made a striking figure. A huge diamond ring sparkled on his finger as he removed his beaver, his eyes widening in surprise.

"Well, Sheriff," he observed crisply, "this is a funny place for you to be. With yore jail bein' busted open and all!"

Brady Kildaine scowled. "Save it, Jardeen," he growled. Then to Fill-

more, "I'm chargin' yuh with aidin' a jail-break, Sam. It goes without sayin' that yuh won't try and leave, so I'll let yuh be where yuh are, and Sheila with yuh for a while."

Dart Jardeen gave him a cool, mocking smile. At the doorway, Kildaine turned and faced them.

"Have yore laughs now," he told them, "because yuh won't feel like laughin' when the kick-back comes."

Then he went outside. The rain had slackened, and as he made his way rapidly toward the jail, all he could think of was that Chet was free and that Sam Fillmore and Sheila had aided in the jail-break. Yet there was little he could do about it. It was his word against Fillmore's and the rancher would deny any complicity. And Dart Jardeen could swear that the sheriff was in the room of his own free will. Jardeen hadn't seen any gun covering Kildaine.

There was a crowd about the jail entrance, and the sheriff pushed through into his office, then down the corridor to Chet's empty cell. Chet was not the only one gone! Pelo Castron's cell also was empty. Both cell door locks had been smashed by bullets.

Matt Tidwell, a serious-minded, meek little gray-haired merchant, touched Brady Kildaine's arm.

"What was yuh doin', Brady," he asked quietly, "while this outlawry was takin' place?"

Kildaine wanted to explain. But how could he tell these men he had been tricked by the girl he loved?

"Sorry, Matt," he said to Tidwell. "Nothin' to say."

"Yuh mean," Tidwell pressed, "yuh're hidin' the reason yuh wasn't here?"

The sheriff's eyes went hard. "I'm runnin' this office, Matt. I'll get Chet Fillmore back, and Castron, too . . . Now, clear out, all of yuh!"

Brady Kildaine knew what was in the minds of those muttering men as they left. And he knew that this jail-break would make him the laughing stock of Osage Basin.

## CHAPTER III

### *Thicker Than Blood*

SCOWLING, Sheriff Kildaine rolled a smoke. He lit it, and began pacing the floor. The more he thought of how he had been duped, the madder he got. Sheila's actions weighed heavily on his mind. And, of course, Jardeen's timely appearance had been to insure Fillmore's alibi!

The sheriff stalked out of his office and straight to the Shamrock Belle, ignoring the curious glances shot in his direction.

From the sullen barkeep, he learned that Jardeen was not there. Probably out busy discrediting the sheriff, Kildaine thought bitterly.

He guessed right.

In the Purple Palace he found Jardeen surrounded by men at the bar, drinking and telling his story, elaborating fluently. As Brady Kildaine made his way through the crowd, a tight hush fell. But Jardeen gave no indication he was aware of the sheriff.

"And when I went in to tell Sam about Chet bein' freed," he was saying, "who do yuh suppose I met? Sheriff Kildaine, a-settin' and a-rockin' as contented as a granny at a quiltin' party! While his own jail was bein' smashed open!"

His heavy sarcasm brought guffaws from his circle of listeners. Burning with anger the sheriff strode toward Jardeen. The lawyer-saloon keeper watched him with a smirk, lifting his whiskey glass.

"Well, well!" he murmured. "Our own visitin' sheriff! Didn't yuh forget yore knittin'?"

Kildaine grabbed the front of Jar-

deen's white silk shirt, twisted, and their eyes clashed.

"Where are Chet and Pelo Castron?" Kildaine demanded.

"Yuh seem to be so close to the Fillmores, Sheriff," Jardeen taunted, with a grin, "suppose yuh tell us." He was daring the sheriff to do something about the jail-break.

Kildaine drove his fist against Jardeen's jaw. The stocky man crashed backward, one hand clutching at the bar. Kildaine smashed him again. Jardeen went down hard, tipping over a spittoon. It's contents splashed his immaculate suit and white silk shirt.

Brady Kildaine jerked the man to his feet. Behind him Jardeen's gunmen were closing in. The saloonman's jaws were knotted, his mouth a bloodless slash in a face pale with rage. His eyes were like those of a rattler about to strike.

"Remember now where them fellers are?" the sheriff pressed grimly.

Jardeen's gaze flicked past him to his tense gunmen. Kildaine heard a warning hammer-click behind him, dropped his right hand to his gun butt.

Jardeen's face was like paste, with red blotches on his jaw where the sheriff's fist had smashed. And if Brady Kildaine had ever seen treachery, he saw it in those unblinking eyes. Suddenly a crooked smile touched Jardeen's lips. A hurt look came to his face and, as if outraged, he jerked away from the sheriff and faced the crowd with a gesture of utter helplessness.

"Yuh've all seen what's happened," he said in a voice that held resentment of this injustice. "This attack on me was plumb unwarranted, and unprovoked. But I won't press charges. I'll just leave it up to you folks if yuh think this violent man is worthy of the high office yuh've elected him to."

BRADY KILDAINE was momentarily taken aback by Jardeen's shrewdness in appealing to public opinion. He had wanted a showdown with the man here and now, but Jardeen, sharp-witted lawyer that he was, had snatched the opportunity to drive the wedge of distrust further between Brady and the citizens of Tres Pasos! Jardeen, it was plain now, still hoped to be sheriff himself.

Everyone in the saloon was watching, listening, and Brady Kildaine saw gathering doubt in the faces of men who had been his friends. A half-smile was on his lips as he looked at Jardeen.

"All right, hombre," he drawled softly. "This hand is yores. We'll deal another."

Without a glance at Jardeen's gunmen, he pushed through the crowd and headed for a Mexican restaurant down the street.

The sheriff had finished eating and was paying for his meal when he noticed that Quevedo, the fat proprietor, was regarding him with doleful concern.

"Well, what's the matter?" he demanded irritably.

"Senor," Quevedo said, "you a good sheriff. Eet was not your fault Pelo Castron escape. But Pelo ees *muy malo!* He weel try to keel you, senor! Kildaine took the solicitous warning with a faint smile. It was something to have one man in town for him anyhow, he thought sarcastically, as he went outside.

The rain had stopped and a cool breeze blew in off the range. Deep in thought as to the most logical hideout of Pelo Castron and Chet, he headed for his office. As he passed the darkened buildings, he kept his hand near his gun butt.

Suddenly he saw Sheila coming toward him. The light from store windows showed the battling emotions in her face. The sheriff stopped before her.

"I've been looking for you, Brady," she said. "Dad and I—we have something important to talk to you about.

Will you come home with me?"

She turned and he fell in step alongside her.

"I—I understand Castron is free," she said tightly.

"He is," the sheriff said dryly. "Be tough on yore conscience if Castron gets me, won't it, Sheila?"

He saw her lip quiver and the stricken look on her face. Suddenly he wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her, tell her he hadn't meant what he said. But he didn't. No word was spoken between them until they were at Sheila's front door. Brady followed her inside.

"We have something to tell you about Chet," she murmured over her shoulder.

The sheriff followed her through the hall to Sam Fillmore's bedroom. A strange warning suddenly beat at his brain. Sheila opened the door, and he went into the lighted bedroom after her—and what he saw smacked him between the eyes like a horrible blow!

Sheila's crashing scream died on her lips as she dropped in a dead faint. Kildaine caught her, but could not take his eyes from Sam Fillmore on his bed. The rancher's throat had been cut from ear to ear!

Kildaine carried Sheila into the living room, then he ran outside and yelled at a passing man.

"Fetch Doc Magruder and his wife! Pronto!"

RUSHING back inside, Kildaine did what he could for Sheila until little Doc Magruder arrived with his wife. Doc made a hasty examination of Sheila, mumbled a few instructions to his wife, and followed Brady into Fillmore's bedroom.

But there was no need for a doctor here—that was plain. As Magruder drew the sheet up over Fillmore's face, the sheriff caught the glint of a knife on the floor. He picked it up. It was a large stock knife, such as any cattleman would carry, its open blade blood-smeared. As Kildaine stared at it, dread raced through him. The nicks and scratches on the bone handle were as familiar to him as his own hand!

"Yuh know whose knife it is?" Doc Magruder asked.

Young Kildaine made no answer. It was Black John Kildaine's, given him years ago by Sam Fillmore when their friendship was strong. Ironic that the token of friendship had taken the donor's life! But had it been Black John's hand that had slashed Fillmore's life away? No! But the evidence of this knife was fatal.

Because the single window in the bedroom was locked, the conclusion was obvious. Fillmore had been murdered by a man he trusted, who had come there as a friend.

Brady Kildaine moved about the room seeking some clue to the killer. Could he have been Pelo Castron? Hardly. Castron had no reason, and he had not been a close friend of Sam Fillmore's. Dart Jardeen? Not likely, either. The lawyer stood to lose fat law fees by this death.

Brady Kildaine heard people coming quietly into the room. Then a man beside him said in a well-modulated voice:

"That's Black John's knife, ain't it, Sheriff?"

Brady Kildaine glanced into the taunting eyes of Dart Jardeen. The sheriff's eyes slitted, probing for a sign of guilt beneath Jardeen's cool veneer. Then as he saw the townsmen filing into the room and he started for the door, closing the knife and putting it in his pocket.

"Yuh're goin' to arrest yore old man for Sam's murder, ain't yuh, Sheriff?" Jardeen pressed mercilessly. "Sam was my friend. I aim to see justice done. If yuh've got any notions of lettin' Black John get away with this I'm goin' to swear out a warrant for his arrest! If you don't put him in jail, then me and my men will!"

There was sympathy for Sheriff Kildaine in the eyes of some of those

men as he shoved through them, dazed. In his heart he knew that Black John had not done this terrible thing. Yet Black John was of the old order, a fighter who would eliminate anything threatening his domain.

In the living room, several women stood around, crying. Sheila lay on the couch, her body shuddering with choking sobs. Mrs. Magruder was talking soothingly. Though hating himself for doing so, Brady tried to question Sheila. She might throw some light on her father's murder. But Mrs. Magruder and the other women protested so heatedly that he was forced to give up.

He went straight to the State Hotel where the clerk told him that his father and Slugger London had gone out to the ranch. Tight-lipped, Brady went back to the jail. He rigged his buckskin and rode off toward his father's Flying Arrow, sick with the job he had to do.

AS HE followed the muddy trail winding over the wet, clean-smelling flats he cursed fruitlessly. Again it had happened! Because he had sworn to uphold the law, he had to hurt and shame those whom he would protect most! Yet unless he brought Black John in he would be admitting his father's guilt.

When Brady Kildaine rode into the muddy yard of the Flying Arrow and dismounted, Black John suddenly opened the front door. He held a flickering lamp in one hand, a .45 in the other. At sight of his son's granite face, he drew back and the sheriff went inside. "What's the matter?" Black John asked quickly.

Young Kildaine searched his father's face a terrible moment for betraying signs of guilt, though feeling disloyal. Black John shut the door, and set the lamp and gun on the table. The sheriff brought out Black John's stock knife and held it in his palm. Black John stared bewilderedly.

"I knowed I lost my knife," he said, "but yuh didn't ride all the way out here just to return it, did yuh?"

"Sam Fillmore was murdered tonight, Dad."

Black John's eyes widened. "Well, that ain't no loss," he snorted, then his hard-bitten face screwed up in a perplexed frown. "What yuh drivin' at, Brady?" he asked sharply.

"This knife murdered him," his son said flatly.

The words hit Black John like a physical blow. "Yuh—yuh don't think I done that!"

The sheriff shook his head. "No, Dad, I don't. But other folks do. Dart Jardeen's swearin' out a warrant for yore arrest." He paused as Black John

disbelievingly scanned his face. "I hope yuh understand, Dad," he said dully. "There ain't nothin' I can do but take yuh to jail."

At first Black John was too taken aback to speak.

"Yuh're foolin', son—" he began then, with a forced smile, but shock and deep hurt were in his face. "I been framed," he muttered. "You know danged well I didn't kill Sam. Yet yuh stand there tellin' me I gotta go to jail."

"My only alternative is to resign," the young sheriff said. "If I did, Jardeen would get himself into office and yuh'd be arrested anyhow. And plumb little chance I'd have of gettin' the guilty man then."

Black John looked old and tired and resigned. "I don't see it that way a'tall," he said stubbornly. "But I'll go with yuh."

Brady Kildaine's lean face lost some of its tightness. Frankly, he was

surprised. Black John, in all his fiery, fighting life had never bowed down to anyone. Now the grizzled old warrior started toward a door, shaking his head and mumbling about getting some clothes. Suddenly he whirled, a dark scowl on his face.

"Brady," he bawled, "it's against my better judgment to be locked up in that chicken coop! It ain't right a-tall! Sam's friends might try lynchin' me. I ain't guilty and—I ain't goin'!"

BRADY KILDAINE felt shaken. This was what he had feared would happen. And he knew that all the pleading in the world would not budge Black John. The sheriff stepped forward grimly.

"Don't try what yuh're thinkin', son!" Snatching his six-gun from the table, he said, "God forgive me!"

Brady Kildaine felt sick. His lips were set, his face ashen. His father might be bluffing, but he himself must not forget his sworn, lawful duty. The law was thicker than blood. People didn't count. He had implied that to Sheila.

"I'm sorry yuh won't understand, Dad," he said in a strained voice. "But yuh're comin'!"

As a metallic tap came on the window pane, the sheriff let his glance shift to the window for a brief instant. A livid flash of blue-tinged flame leaped into the room with a blasting explosion. The lamp was shattered by a shotgun at the window. Young Kildaine heard a door open. He hurtled forward, raking out his gun.

But he collided with a charging body. Something smashed below his ear, knocking him to his knees. A black void splashed with knifing lights enveloped his brain. He tried to shake it off, but felt himself growing dizzier, dimly heard voices shouting around him. Then he sprawled out, oblivious to the dark shapes hovering over him.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Lynch Law*

BRADY KILDAINE regained consciousness as quickly as he had lost it. He sat bolt upright, instinctively running his fingers toward the hammering pain in his head. He found a neat bandage there. Familiar things in his own room in town took shape before his eyes in the early morning sunlight. Doc Magruder was standing beside his bed, looking down at him.

"What the devil, Doc?" he blurted.

"Slugger London brought yuh in," Doc Magruder said, "but he wouldn't say how yuh come by that blow on yore head. Nor would he leave till I was shore yuh wasn't hurt." As the sheriff moved to get up, Doc Magruder pushed pudgy palms against his chest. "Yuh're stayin' right where yuh are for a spell!"

Kildaine grimaced at the rush of pain to his head.

"How is Sheila?" he asked tightly.

"That poor girl's had enough grief to throw a man," Doc said with admiration, "but she's bearin' up brave."

"When can I talk to her?"

Doc Magruder eyed him sharply. "If yuh mean question her—this afternoon, mebbe. Now get some rest." The doctor paused at the door. "There's some pretty harsh talk goin' around about Black John."

After the medico had gone, Kildaine reflected on last night's events. And, somehow, he was glad things had turned out as they had as far as his attempted arrest of Black John was concerned. Even though it was just postponing the issue, something might come to light on the real murderer.

Brady's head cleared gradually and the pain eased.

After noon the sheriff became increasingly impatient. He got out of bed, a little giddy, and shaky in his legs. But he got dressed. As he pinned his badge on his vest, he stared at it with a queer smile. A powerful thing, that little star. Was it worth all it was costing him—Sheila's love, the antagonism of his father and his friends?

When he went into his office, he was struck by the ominous quiet over Main Street. It was not something he could put his finger on, but something sensed. In a moment he knew what it was when Sheila came rushing into his office. Grief and tears had made her eyes red-lidded, and she was badly scared.

"Brady!" she panted. "They're going to lynch Chet!"

Brady Kildaine heard the sullen growl of an angry crowd down the street as she spoke.

"Easy, Sheila," he urged softly. "Who's aimin' to lynch Chet, and why?"

"He just came in on the stage from El Paso!" she cried. "Those ranchers have been waiting for him! It all has to do with what Dad and I were going to tell you last night. During a moment of remorse after a spree last week, Chet admitted to me he was working with the men behind these night raids." The sheriff gripped her arm.

"Did Chet name the hombre?"

She shook her head. "No. But he wanted me to help him get a new start. I told Dad last night. Dad insisted on the immediate return to their owners of all those raided ranches he had bought. He wanted it done last night, but the deeds were in a safety deposit box in an El Paso bank where only Dad or Chet had access to them." Mounting fear took hold of her. "Brady! Listen to that mob!"

"Go on!" Brady prompted tersely.

"Dart Jardeen suggested we get Chet out of jail and send him after the deeds." She was talking fast now, pleading. "That's why I drew you away from the jail, Brady! I knew you'd fight to hold Chet, and I couldn't ever stand seeing you hurt!" She broke off, her eyes desperate. "Hurry, Brady! They'll kill him!"

"One more thing, Sheila. Was Jardeen with you and yore father last night when yuh was talkin' about returnin' the ranches?"

"Yes!"

"Did yuh tell anyone else of yore plans?"

"No!"

"Then how do those ranchers *know* Chet's been raidin' 'em? And how did they know Chet had gone to El Paso and was comin' in on that stage?"

"Dart!" Sheila cried. "Dart Jardeen told them! He wants Chet lynched! Oh, Brady! Hurry!"

NOW Brady Kildaine moved—fast!

He turned to the gun rack on the wall and snatched a rifle. Then as he whirled toward the door, a shadow fell across the room. Pelo Castron blocked the doorway, his bow-legs planted wide, twin six-shooters gripped in his dirty paws!

"I tole you I come back, Keeldaine." The 'breed grinned mirthlessly. "I tole you I keel you."

Brady Kildaine knew how close he was to death. And another life depended on him. Chet's. Kildaine's eyes slitted, and his knuckles showed white on his rifle barrel. Inside he was flame, but outwardly he was calm. Pelo Castron came inside warily.

"All right, Castron," Kildaine said resignedly. "You win."

Gripping his rifle by the barrel he slid it across the top of his desk. Expecting a bullet any second, he was casually careful the barrel pointed in Castron's direction.

Sheila was cringing against the wall, the blood drained from her horror-struck face. In the one instant that Castron's bloodshot eyes raked her with a meaningful glance, Kil-

daine sidestepped, and rammed his forefinger against the trigger of his rifle.

Castron's curse died in the rocking explosion. The bullet hurled him backward as his big guns roared. The terrific impact of that .30-30 slug in his belly had spoiled his aim, and Kildaine was dropping hammer on his own six-gun now. The second slug smashed through the 'breed's chest and crashed him to the floor, but he was not dead yet.

Kildaine was struck by a sudden hunch. There was a reason for Castron's appearance at the same time as Chet's capture by the lynch mob! Knowing that bullet shock often will make the most vicious of men talk, he aimed his six-gun at Castron's stomach. "Tell me all yuh know about Jardeen, Castron," he clipped.

It was a shot in the dark, but it hit home!

Castron twisted his blood-frothed lips in a sneer. The sheriff thumbed back his hammer. Fear was in Castron's eyes.

"Don' shoot!" he pleaded in a hoarse whisper. "I talk! Jardeen get me out of calaboose. He pay me feefty dollar' to keel Sam weeth a knife. He pay me to keel you."

Castron's voice faded. Death was near. Brady knew all he wanted to know now though as he hustled Sheila outside. "You hurry home!" he ordered brusquely. "This thing has just begun to end!"

The hot sunshiny street was quiet except for the rumble of the lynch mob outside the stage depot. Brady raced down the street until he neared the Shamrock Belle, diagonally across from the stage depot.

He noted Dart Jardeen, backed by his hard-faced gunmen, standing in front of the Shamrock Belle. As they turned to watch him he knew showdown was imminent. But the sheriff's first duty was to save Chet.

All the pieces of the puzzle fitted together. Jardeen had suggested Chet get the deeds from El Paso, and had schemed to eliminate the boy and his father. With only Sheila left, it would be easy for him, as family lawyer, to embezzle the entire estate! Part of the same scheme was framing Fillmore's murder on Black John, and the death of Brady Kildaine himself.

THE mob now had Chet standing on the high rear wheel of the stage-coach, with two men on top adjusting a noose about his neck. A bearded man in the driver's seat awaited the signal to bolt the teams. Chet's protests were frenzied.

Kildaine sent a rifle bullet smashing into the tree limb supporting the rope over the mob's heads. As the crowd turned as one man, the sheriff saw familiar faces—Will Oden, Zack Akard, Ed Kingman. All friends of his. There were others, small Basin men who had been forced by night raids to sell out cheap to Sam Fillmore.

"Hold on, boys!" Kildaine ordered.

His eyes were not upon the lynch mob, but focused into the glass windows of Longworth's Hardware Store across the street, windows that reflected Dart Jardeen with his gunmen at his back.

"Chet is my prisoner—"

The sheriff broke off, jerking around. The reflection had shown Jardeen's hand lift in a signal. One gunman was throwing down on Kildaine's back. The sheriff's shot sounded on the echo of the gunman's and the fellow crashed to the boardwalk. The other gunmen were going into action now. A bullet drove into Kildaine's arm, spilling him down.

"Get him, yuh fools!" Jardeen's voice racketed across the street. "He ain't dead!"

Twisting over, Brady sent a hail of lead that drove Jardeen and his gunmen scurrying for cover inside the saloon. Three bodies of their comrades sprawled near the saloon front.

Quickly Kildaine was on his feet

and running toward the lynch mob. Bystanders were scattering in all directions. Chet's fearful eyes were upon the sheriff in a wild, hopeful glance. The crowd of grim, leathery-faced ranchmen flocked toward Brady in astonishment, questioning him.

Then a crash of gunfire broke from the Shamrock Belle. One man toppled from the stage-coach. Another cowman staggered, gripping his bullet-smashed thigh.

"Take cover inside the depot, boys!" Kildaine yelled.

The two men on the coach jumped down, forcing the wild-eyed Chet ahead of them into the stage office. The coach horses raced madly off. Brady Kildaine, the last man inside, slammed the door on the gunfire.

"What the devil is this all about, Brady?" Zack Akard demanded in his booming voice. "Why is Jardeen shootin' at us?"

"You tell 'em, Chet," the sheriff suggested pointedly.

Chet's fear-bright eyes flicked from one rancher to another, then came to rest on Kildaine. Gone was his defiant, insolent manner. His near-hanging had struck fear into his heart, leaving him remorseful and penitent.

"I don't exactly know how to start, Brady," he faltered, rubbing his rope-burned neck. "I feel like a lobo . . . Jardeen's men got me out of jail. Dad sent me to El Paso to get the deeds to you men's ranches. He was goin' to return 'em, because he found out I was mixed in with these night raiders. I never told Dad, but the man behind all them raids was Dart Jardeen."

"Where are the deeds now, Chet?" Kildaine asked.

Chet looked trapped. "I—er—was sorta afraid Jardeen would hold up the stage. So I threw the package into a clump of beargrass at the first turn in Bearhead Canyon. They're safe!"

"That clears a lot of things!" Ed Kingman snapped. "Jardeen's gunnin' us because he's after them deeds hisself!"

"That's right, boys," the sheriff told them flatly. "Jardeen had his eye on them ranches all along. He never meant for 'em to be returned. But Sam Fillmore did. He was honest enough in his dealin's with yuh, not knowin' his son and his lawyer was makin' things easy for him. Jardeen has played a slick, waitin' game to get Sam's holdin's. We're facin' a fight that means the end of him—or the end of us! Against odds of three to one!"

THE ranchers, fighters all, quickly rallied behind Brady Kildaine. Under his cool orders they began slamming back the fire of Jardeen and the gunmen. The sheriff stood near the door, firing through a crack. A man brushed him and he turned.

It was Chet, a desperate plea in his sunken eyes. "Gimme a gun, Brady!" he begged. "Let me help yuh!"

Kildaine's stare was cold.

"Just one more chance, Brady!" Chet pleaded. "I want to go straight now! Please—for Sheila's sake!"

Kildaine was doubtful. Yet he needed every gun-hand.

"All right," he agreed, but there was a warning in his eyes.

Zack Akard, nearby, handed Chet a spare six-gun. Chet began firing.

From across the street lead was spouting at them from every window of the Shamrock Belle. Bullets splashed glass from their own windows and gorged splinters from the door. Some gunnies were lying on the roof of the Belle, blazing away with rifles. Kildaine got one of them.

And for the next half hour the gunfight raged on, a scream-punctured, blasting inferno, with neither side showing any sign of weakening. One rancher lay dead. Three others were wounded.

But the cowmen had not been prepared for seige. Brady Kildaine knew that when he called a halt in the firing.

"They're tryin' to force us out of ammunition," he told the grim little

band. "And they've about done it. Then they'll rush us. We wouldn't last long in hand-to-hand fightin' without no shells. So spread out yore shots. If we can hold 'em off till dark, we might make a break to a new stand."

"If we could only get to that hardware store!" one rancher sighed heavily. "Old Longworth *could* throw us shells, but he's probably scared clean up the other end of town!"

Kildaine gazed at the hardware store, weighing an attempt to run for it. But to cross that thirty feet of clear street in open view of Jardeen's gunmen was suicide. His eyes lifted to a moving figure atop the store, and shock rippled through him.

Sheila! Protected from view of the Shamrock Belle crowd by the high false front of the store, she stood there signaling, holding a box of ammunition. Then he saw her stuffing a gunny-sack with boxes of shells. She must have sensed their plight, and risked her life to come to their aid.

She stood up, straining against the weight of the half-filled sack. She managed to get it swinging around her head, and flung it toward the window of the depot, where those embattled cowmen and the man she loved were watching her.

Eagerly their eyes followed the descent of the sack. Then gasps of disappointment came huskily from smoke-dried throats.

The sack landed in the street fifteen feet from them! Wildly the cursing sheriff motioned for Sheila to leave. Jardeen's gunmen had seen the sack thrown and were slamming a devastating fire through that false front.

Sheila waved some kind of signal, and disappeared beyond the roof edge.

A SHARP, warning cry from lanky Ed Kingman pulled the men around. Flames were leaping up one of the walls. And Chet was gone!

"He doublecrossed us!" Zack Akard roared savagely. "He set this shack on fire! . . . Lemme get my sights on that skunk!"

"Hold on, Zack!" Brady rapped.

He had seen the broken fragments of a lamp among the flames, and a rider was racing away in the street. That gunman rider had daringly hurled the lighted lamp through a window! It had burst, drenching walls and floor with flaming kerosene. Kildaine shot the rider out of his saddle.

Then the sheriff saw Chet. The young fellow was sprinting wildly for that sack of desperately needed shells." Guns from the saloon slammed a hail of bullets about him. Yelling for a blast of gunfire to cover Chet, the sheriff cut loose with his six-gun.

Chet saw all those guns throwing death at him, but he never slackened his pace. He was only a few feet from the shells when a bullet dropped him. He twisted, scrambled forward, white-faced with pain. In that rain of bullets, he fought his way to the sack and grabbed it. Another slug jolted through him, but he held to the ammunition and tried to drag himself back to the blazing depot. When still another bullet slammed into him he fell in final agony. Chet Fillmore had died like a man! He had given up his life in a valiant effort to help the men he had wronged.

## CHAPTER V

### *Never Say Die*

MEN now were fighting the spreading flames with blankets. But the depot was doomed to swift, blazing ruin. Ranchers and sheriff would burn to death, or meet the same fate as young Fillmore.

"They'll come runnin' out of there like rabbits," Jardeen's crisp voice came to them above

the crackle of the flames. "When they do, bring down each man!"

Kildaine raked his eyes over the grimy, sweat-streaked faces of his friends. He knew what each man held in his mind, but was trying hard to conceal—that this was their end.

But Brady Kildaine's indomitable spirit would never let him quit. He hastened into the little ante-room behind the office. Outside was a clear space used for loading the freighters and beyond were two huge barns.

But they would never be able to cross that open space. A small haystack under a tin roof facing the hardware store roused a faint hope in him.

Hurrying back to his grimy crew, he told them tersely:

"We've got one chance, boys—that haystack out back. We'll run for it one at a time, covering each other. The smoke will help us. Start it, Zack. When yuh get there, help cover the next man, and so on."

Zack Akard picked up the wounded man, and tore out the back door. The sheriff himself covered them. Shielding their faces from the hungry flames and choking smoke the rest unlimbered their six-guns at the Shamrock Belle as gunmen poured out the swing doors, guns blazing.

"Yuh got to do better'n that, Jardeen!" Akard yelled defiantly, as he made the dash safely.

One after another they ran. All made it safely, due probably to the great billows of smoke shrouding the rear of the depot. Brady, the last to go, left just as the roof came crashing down, filling the air with sparks and cinders.

Bullets hailed around him, but he slid safely behind the haystack. But already flying sparks were threatening their new fortress. Protected from last night's rain, the haystack was tinder dry!

They worked like bees, moving that hay, bale by bale, farther out into the street, pushing the bales ahead of them as shields against bullets. But those undaunted cowmen moved their fortress away from the depot and set it up in the street. Five bales high and two bales thick it stood, and stopped everything Dart Jardeen and his men had to throw at it.

But their safety was short-lived.

From the hardware store a gunman was throwing a weighted, flaming gunny-sack! It landed outside the fortress. Quickly leaping flames showed that the hay had caught fire. Kildaine cursed hoarsely, and shot the man who had thrown the fiery sack. A cowman dropped another gunman.

"That fixes 'em, boys!" came Dart Jardeen's voice, loud and raspy with triumph. "That hay will burn down to the ground right in front of them. Then let 'em have all yuh got!"

And Brady Kildaine knew he was right. There was no escape now. Just a last-ditch fight. The cowmen knew that, too. Still the sheriff was conscious of no fear, only regret that he failed, and that all he had fought for was to be lost.

IT WAS sundown, a time of the day when there should have been peace. But peace, like the law Brady fought for, stood to be erased in Tres Pasos town in this one wild day.

Great billows of smoke filled the street, choking their lungs and stinging their eyes. The hay bales would soon be ashes.

Kildaine's blurred vision showed him a killer snaking along the top of the Shamrock Belle. His gun crashed. The agonizing cry wrung from that killer gave the beleaguered sheriff a moment of fierce satisfaction.

"That's one less hombre to dance at our funerals!" Ed Kingman grunted.

Through the crackling flames and roaring guns, Kildaine thought he heard a pounding something like thunder far off. Then it sounded more like the drum of racing horses' hoofs. He tried to penetrate the smoke fog, but could see nothing. He guessed he was imagining things, and gave all his

attention to the battle, praying for just one shot at Dart Jardeen out of his remaining six shells.

But again the rumbling came, and this time with a wild battle cry that sheered down Main Street like a banshee wail. And Brady Kildaine saw such a sight that made him blink his smoke-bleary eyes.

Down the street thundered a string of gun-brandishing, battle-howling riders! Leading them, astride his magnificent, plunging black stallion, was Black John Kildaine!

The sheriff's heart pounded with pride as he watched the riders swoop nearer. The cowmen with him flung long whoops of joy into the din, almost dancing in their jubilation.

Black John waved his six-gun. Half of his thirty-odd men split, raced down a side street toward the rear of the Shamrock Belle, under the leadership of Slugger London. Black John himself led his own group straight for the Belle doors, his six-gun lancing flame.

Black John charged head-on through those doors, his hard-riding punchers plunging right behind him. Yells sheered that twilight, and Brady Kildaine and his men broke away from their blazing, crumbling fortress and ran hard across the street.

Pandemonium filled the air, and Jardeen's killers, faced with swift death and destruction from both front and rear, dived out windows, and came to their feet with their hands lifted. Some made a wild rush to the doorways and were struck down by those charging riders.

Sheriff Kildaine barged inside. Quickly the shooting died down. Yells and loud talking and blowing horses in that barroom made a strange din.

Then the lawman found the one man he sought.

Dart Jardeen was coming around the end of the bar, barging through the débris and bodies of men he had paid to die for greed and vice. Jardeen was grimy-faced, disheveled, but with no outward sign of fear. His guns swung to young Kildaine and it seemed all were watching, knowing that this was the lawman's fight, and his alone.

"At least, I'll take you with me, Kildaine!" Jardeen gloated, and in his eyes was all the hatred one man could hold for another.

Both Jardeen's guns were crashing as the sheriff's own hammer dropped. Brady Kildaine's first slug took Jardeen in the shoulder, spun him half around. Jardeen tottered forward, swaying, his face ashen and hideous in the half-light, his blood scarlet on his white silk shirt. His slugs slammed dangerously near Kildaine's and the young sheriff was forced to shoot him through the head.

JARDEEN seemed to poise on a forward step, his guns hanging down crazily. Then he buckled, and went down.

"That's the finish!" Zack Akard boomed.

There was loud talk and eager voices all about Brady Kildaine. Then Sheila was coming inside and toward him. Black John picked his way through the débris and came to him. It seemed as if everybody was talking and explaining at the same time.

"Sheila come ridin' like Satan hisself this afternoon, Brady," Black John was explaining, "to tell me what you and them other boys was up against. So me'n Slugger rounded up my fightin' crew. This kind of law I can *sabe!*"

Sheila's chin was up, her head held proudly. And dejection rippled through Brady Kildaine at the thought he had lost her.

"I just wanted to tell you, Brady," she said, her dark eyes unwavering, "that everything I did was done because I thought it was right. Maybe, after all, everything has worked out for the best. Maybe—" She stopped, then her voice was choked and in it

was a note of sadness as she added, "I'll always be very proud of you, Brady Kildaine!"

"Yuh mean—" Brady began.

"I'm going away," she said, fighting to keep back her tears. "Can you forgive me, Brady?"

Black John pressed forward, scowling. "Going away!" he echoed. "Where to, child?"

Though protests came from two dozen throats in that room, long, loud and demanding that she stay, Brady Kildaine did not wait.

He drew her close to him, because he had fought for this girl, and because he loved her, and nothing in heaven or earth could take her from him. She trembled against him, sobbing softly, giving ease to the terrible strain of her pent-up emotions. Brady held her silently, powerfully aware of her nearness, and her fragrance, and more relieved than he could ever say. Then he kissed her.

He heard the voice at his side, but he paid no heed.

"Brady," it kept repeating, "Brady . . ."

At length he turned impatiently. Slugger London stood there, looking like a huge schoolboy caught robbing the pickle barrel.

"What yuh want, Slugger?" he demanded.

Slugger sheepishly stared at his feet.

"How does yore head feel, Brady?"

"My head's all right! What's eatin' yuh?"

"I'm givin' myself up, Sheriff," Slugger said submissively, but with dignity. "Surrenderin'—"

"What on earth for?"

Slugger looked at Black John. Black John looked away.

"For keepin' yuh from arrestin' Black John. I figgered if Black John was in jail, a lynch mob might get him. So I just sorta took the wind out of yore sails with a tap on yore head."

Brady Kildaine looked hard at Slugger. The big ex-seaman actually flushed under that stare.

"Put him in jail, Sheriff!" some puncher hoorawed.

But a lazy smile touched the lawman's lips.

"Yuh done me a big favor, Slugger," he drawled. "That arrest would have been false arrest. Yuh kept *me* from breakin' the law!"


# Getting Up Nights Makes Many Feel Old Too Soon

If you're feeling out o'sorts, Get Up Nights or suffer from Burning Passages, Backache, Swollen Ankles, Nervousness, Rheumatic Pains, Dizziness, Circles Under Eyes and feel worn-out, the cause may be non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles.

Worry, Colds, working too hard, or overeating or drinking may create an excess of Acids and overload your Kidneys so that they need help to flush out poisonous wastes that might otherwise undermine your health.

## Help Kidneys Remove Acids

Nature provides the Kidneys to clean and purify your blood and to remove excess Acids. The Kidneys contain about nine million tiny tubes or filters through which the heart pumps blood about 200 times an hour, night and day, so it's easy to see that they may get tired and slow down when overloaded.

Fourteen years ago a practicing physician's prescription called Cystex was made available to the public through drug stores, making it easy and inexpensive to help thousands suffering from non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles in these three simple ways: 1. Help the Kidneys remove excess acids which may become poisoning and irritating. 2. To palliate burning and smarting of the urinary passages, and bladder irritation. 3. Help the Kidneys flush out wastes which may become poisonous if allowed to accumulate, thus aiding nature in stimulating an increase of energy, which may easily make you feel years younger.

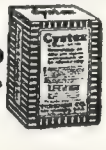
## Guaranteed Trial Offer

Usually, in non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder disorders the very first dose of Cystex goes right to work helping the Kidneys flush out excess Acids, poisons and wastes. And this cleansing, purifying Kidney action, in just a day or so, may easily make you feel younger, stronger and better than in years. An iron clad guarantee insures an immediate refund of all your money unless you are completely satisfied. Get Cystex from your druggist today for only 35¢.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Cystex is produced under the direction of a licensed physician for The Knox Co., one of the largest drug companies in the world with laboratory connections in the U.S.A., Canada, England, Australia and South America. The guarantee of money back unless satisfied is enforced 100% and is a dependable form of assurance to all users of Cystex.*

Now 35c-75c-$1.50

Cystex



Down street the Sweetgrass Volunteers dash, legs churning the dust

# HAM FIGHTS FIRE with FIRE

## By ALFRED L. GARRY

*The deputy of Sweetgrass singes the bankrolls of the Buckstrappers when the local Smoke-eaters get hot under the collar!*

IF MY deputy, Ham, ever pokes his nose inside the city limits of Buckstrap, the citizens are all set to knock it plumb off his face. Buckstrap's swivel-eyed, vote-toadying Sheriff Rawson won't lift a finger to help a brother officer, either. He's more likely to haul out a feather tick and start the tar pot boiling.

The Buckstrappers are all burned up because Ham's out-foxed them, roweled their pride, and singed their bankrolls plenty!

It all starts a few months back when

me and Ham mog over to Buckstrap to pow-wow with Sheriff Rawson about the amount of *dinero* that should be placed on "Gentleman" Lumper's scalp. Gent Lumper being a extra-polite hootowl who's chousing up us lawmen like a burr under a saddle blanket.

Lumper hides out in the bills between Sweetgrass and Buckstrap. Whenever the spirit moves him, he sashays out, pistol-flags a stage or wagon train, lifts the strong-box, apologizes in high-faluting two-bit words, and vanishes total and complete.

We ride the seats of our levis thin trying to cut his trail. But, trap-wise as an old gray lobo, Gent Lumper always gives us the slip.

So there's only one thing to do. Me and Sheriff Rawson's got to get together and place a reward on Lumper's hide that'll appeal to some of the professional reward hunters.

I ain't one to hold to hiring paid man-hunters to bring in my hootowls. But with the Labor Day celebration not far off, me and Ham have to whip our volunteer fire department into shape for the annual contest with Sheriff Rawson's Buckstrap firemen. No mere outlaw can be allowed to interfere with that event.

As we lope into Buckstrap, a milling crowd of howling, wild-eyed buckaroos erupt from a store in a swirling yammering riot. Their angry faces are flushed, their voices hoarse and shaking with rage.

"Get a rope!" they howl frantically. "String him up!"

"Tar and feather him!"

"Cut off the heathen's pigtail!"

Bent double in the center of the cuffing mob is Lung Chung, Buckstrap's laundryman. His arms are wrapped protectingly around his head. He reels and staggers, helpless under the barrage of blows and kicks rained upon him. It's one poor Chinese without the spunk of a titmouse against ten infuriated hairpins.

WE LOOK for Rawson to come barging out of his office and pistol-whip the mob into behaving itself. But he just stands on the porch currying his mustache, watching the assault and battery without interest. A fine peace officer, him!

"Egg, what a chance!" Ham cries, sinking his heel irons. "I'm darned tired of washin' my own duds! Here's where I get a shore 'nuff laundryman for Sweetgrass!"

That's Ham! Always clumping his big boots where angles fear to tiptoe! My pardner rams his bronc reckless into the middle of the swirling riot. Parceling out clouts, he beats a swath to the cringing Chinese, jerks him erect, and stands off the brawlers.

"Ain't you Buckstrap louts got no manners?" Ham barks, his hands hovering over his guns to show he ain't fooling. "Ten of yuh bruisers pickin' on one pore half-pint Chinese!"

"Yeah! Buttinsky!" A hairpin shoves his rage-red ugly mug right up to Ham. "That heathen's done to us what a cowman wouldn't do to a sheepherder!"

"Walk yore hosses, boys—slack off!" Ham soothes, at the same time giving the hairpin a unplayful shove so's he can't wrap up his gun-haul. "What could this chicken-muscle Oriental do to you big strappin' lobos?"

"He's plumb ruined us! That's what!"

"Shore! Look, Sheriff, we're the Buckstrap Volunteer Fire Department!"

To prove it, the speaker holds up one of their uniforms. Alas! Instead of the gaudy sunset red shirt with the shamrock-green shield on the front, the shirt he's waving around is faded to a washed-out pink, with sickly green streaks run together in a mess.

"The slant-eye's washed our uniforms in lye—like he does levis!" the waddy laments. "They're ruined for the Firemen's Ball and the Labor Day Contest!"

Lung Chung at this point commences to spout. In his sing-song high-pitched jabber, he gives a long spiel in Chinese. Ham, with the nodding expression of a wise old owl, pays close attention, as though he understands every word the excited Chinese is pouring out.

When Lung finishes, Ham drops his hands to the butts of his guns and proceeds to sink his rowels deep into the thin skins of the whole Buckstrap Volunteer Fire Department.

"Lung, here, swears he washed yore two-bit uniforms in soft water and mild soap," he taunts. "But they were so sleazy, so blamed cheap, that they faded like Fourth of July bunting. If you fellers wasn't such cheap Johns and tinhorns, yuh'da paid real money for fast color uniforms! Like *my* Sweetgrass Volunteer Fire Department did!"

"Ham, that's a insult to the City of Buckstrap!"

The crowd whirls to face Sheriff Rawson, who's hot-footed up.

"And the leadin' scissor-bill in it, too!" Ham cracks.

"Meaning me?" Rawson's face goes red.

"If the boot fits, it's on yore foot!" Ham challenges. "Want to make somethin' of it? It's yore move, Rawson!"

The hairpins sidle away like a spilled drop of mercury. It leaves short and fat Ham, bristling like a bantam rooster, facing lean and lanky Sheriff Rawson, who's stooped like a long-legged crane about to spike a frog.

THERE ain't ever been no love lost between Ham and Rawson since they've been elected chiefs of their fire departments. It's a dead immortal cinch their trigger fingers are itching furious.

"Slack off, yuh two fire-eaters!" I clip, shoving between the ruffed-up roosters. "'Tain't fittin' for a pair of lawmen to gun-brace each other!"

"He's insulted my fire department!" Rawson growls. "I demand an apology!"

"Fire department, phewie!" Ham jeers, holding his nose. "My Sweetgrass smoke-eaters can out-run and out-firefight the stumble bums Buckstrap calls a fire department any day of the week!"

"Got any money to back up yore big-mouthed say-so?"

"Yuh danged tootin'!" Ham bellows. "Cash on the line!"

"I've got five hundred that says we win the Labor Day Fire Fighting Contest!" Rawson flares, hot as blue blazes.

"Make it a thousand, yuh cheap John piker!" Ham bluffs, not expecting his hand to be called.

"Fine!" Rawson jerks tight the noose he's laid for Ham. "Fine! That'll just buy us a new set of uniforms!"

Well, sir, we forget all about fixing up a reward for Gentleman Lumper. While Ham and Rawson bicker over the terms of the Labor Day contest, I help the poor trembling Chinese load his laundry equipment on a freight wagon leaving for Sweetgrass.

Win or lose, us Sweetgrassers won't have to wash our own dirty shirts any longer. That is, if we have any left after the fire-fighting contest. . . .

While I'm helping Lung Chung get his laundry business in our town started, Ham calls together the leppies who make up the Sweetgrass Volunteer Fire Department.

"Fellers," Ham proclaims, "we've got a thousand-dollars bet on the Labor Day contest with them Buckstrap slewfoots!"

An astonished murmur goes around the crowd.

"Who puts up this here thousand bucks?" Freddie, the barkeep, wants to know.

"We do! A hundred dollars a head!"

Wow! Ham's Sweetgrass smoke-eaters yelp like a bullet-nipped coyote

No wonder! Buckstrap's taken every contest since we bought our fire-fighting rigs.

"We—we're honor bound," Ham side-hills weakly. "If—if I should capture this hootowler, Gentleman Lumper, I'll ante up my share of the reward. But in the meantime, we got to train hard for the Labor Day contest."

"That's just where I come in, gents!"

We all swivel to read the brand marks of the stranger who's horned in. He's a tall impressive hombre in a fashionable gray frock coat and a wide gray beaver hat. He carries a fancy gold-headed cane, and has that proud goateed bearing of an old Southern colonel. His drawling voice is as soft as the fur of a beaver kitten, and he's as persuasive as a lightning rod salesman.

"May I introduce myself, gentlemen?" he goes on. "I am known as Dr. Colorado, a world-renowned builder of mankind. I expound a phenomenal system of physical culture. A system of body-building perfected by the ancient Greeks of glorious Athens in training for the Olympic Games.

"Totally free, gentlemen, and without so much as a cent of compensation I offer to transform you poor miserable, spavined, hoof-halted specimens of physical imperfection into fleet-footed and nimble Mercurys. You shall pull your fire engine with the lightning rapidity of a frightened antelope! Men, I guarantee that you will leave the Buckstrap Fire Department trailing ignominiously in your dust! If—"

The medicine man's steely eye sweeps the slack-jawed spellbound crowd as he holds up a quivering bony trigger-finger.

"If, gentlemen, you adhere strictly and faithfully to my system of training!"

"What's your cut?" Freddie wants to know.

DR. COLORADO sweeps off his hat with a grand an noble flourish. He bows low to the goggle-eyed buckaroos.

"All I ask, gentlemen," he declares, "is a certain share of the bet money."

The doctor's gleaming eye seems to hynotize the fire laddies. Or are they desperate drowning men grasping hopefully at a straw? Anyway, before I can sniff for a rat, they've all shook hands with the proud-talking medicine man, and bound the bargin.

"My system is no bed of roses!" Dr. Colorado barks just as soon as the pact is sealed by a general hand-shaking. "Hard work! Sweating, soul-tiring hard work, is to be the basis of our success! To win from the Buckstrappers, we must buckle down to a rigorous Spartan routine of physical training. I haven't time for, or patience with quitters! I must have the implicit, instant, and unquestioned obedience of every man in the fire department!"

Well, sir, if Ham and his fire-fighters had knowed what they was letting themselves in for, they would have throwed this Dr. Colorado down a deep well and filled it in. He's a worse slave-driver than Simon Legree. The only thing he ain't got is a blacksnake whip. But his lashing sarcastic tongue is just as good. He rawhides the boys something awful.

We fix up the back room of Freddie's for training quarters. Dr. Colorado insists that the whole fire department sleep there so's there'll be no busting of training rules. He sets up a kitchen, and installs our laundryman, Lung Chung, as a cook, feeding the smoke-eaters plumb scientific.

Dr. Colorado's program to make the fire laddies fleet-footed Mercurys shore gripes in no time. Promptly at five A.M., the doctor strides into the dormitory, banging off his cutter to let the fellers know it's time to rise and shine. Holding a stop-watch, he lifts the hide of the sleepy-heads with his sarcastic tongue until they can

roll out and dress in forty seconds flat from a snoring start.

Then mounting up on his bronc, Dr. Colorado leads the boys off on a cross-country foot race. Up hill and down dale, along the cow trails, the doctor makes them hoof it at a rapid pace.

Poor Ham! He don't pump them bow legs of his a block before his face is all glistening with rivers of sweat as the easy-life blubber boils out of him. By the time the doctor has his straggling line of runners coming back after six miles of cross-country, they are staggering and reeling like unhorsed pilgrims fleeing the Apaches.

And always bringing up in the rear is Ham. His tongue hangs out a foot. He pants like a spent hound. Weaving along, he's barely able to place one lead-heavy foot after another.

At the hoss trough, the doctor has the boys wash up, and herds them over to the breakfast me and Lung have ready. Steak, and fried spuds, and hot cakes with sorghum, and gallons of hot coffee? Not on your tintype! On each hairpin's plate is three prunes, a piece of hard toast, and a glass of hot water!

"Bridle your tongues!" Dr. Colorado holds up a hand, imperious. "Remember, mankind is digging its grave with its teeth! Besides, the less we eat, the more money we will have to bet!"

And he's shore saving the money! At noon the fellers get a piece of lettuce with lemon juice, a soft-boiled egg, and a custard pudding. At the first meat supper there's a near riot. Because, on the doctor's orders, Lung's cooked each man a lamb chop.

"I ain't kickin' because yuh haze us all over the landscape, and starve us until I'm as pore as a winter-killed range bull!" Ham braces Dr. Colorado. "But I've been a cowman all my life! I'm proud to say I've never had no truck with sheepmen, or sheep! And I'm hanged if I'm startin' to eat mutton now! I'm through!"

"That goes for me, too!" a half a dozen other voices bellow.

DR. COLORADO see's he's got a full-sized insurrection on his hands, so he eases up. He orders me and Lung to cook steak for the fellers on their meat nights. It's a measly piece the size of the palm of your hand, and cut so thin you can see the bottom of the plate through it.

But after two weeks, when the fellers line out in front of the old pole buggy we're using for practice in place of our fire engine, I can see that Dr. Colorado's case-hardened system of physical training is bearing fruit.

My tubby pardner, Ham, is slimming way down. His cheeks are gaunt. He's had to take a big gimp in his levis with a saddle blanket pin. The rest of the fellers are getting flat-bellied, thin-cheeked, and razor-faced like trained athletes. Which is just what they are.

At a signal, they stampede from the dormitory like steers busting out of a chute, grab the knotted rope on the pole buggy, and line out down the street like a bat out of Hades. When they come to the building that's supposed to be on fire, they fan out under Chief Ham's directions. Snappily, each volunteer jumps to his appointed task with the speed and efficiency of a big city fire department.

The fellers even commence to take pride in their work. In spite of the dull training grind and constant hoorawing of Dr. Colorado, they're happy because for once they figger Buckstrap ain't goin' to win hands down. After practice, they trundle out our red hose cart, which is the pride of Sweetgrass, and polish it up like a apple for a schoolma'am.

It's a plumb spanking rig. In the center is the gleaming brass pump worked by a lever that's rocked up and down like that on a section gang's hand-car. Hanging on each side are the hooks and ladders, and the various fire-fighting gear. Why, we've even

got a fire axe for every man, so's if fire and water don't completely ruin a burning building, the fellers can chop it to pieces.

But our red and gleaming brass fire apparatus ain't in it for gaudiness when it comes to the feller's new parade uniforms we've bought 'specially for the Labor Day contest. The flannel shirts are orange with a big red *S. F. D.* across the front and back. The tight-legged trousers are canary yellow with a three-inch red stripe. The boys all wear green tin firemen's hats. Ham's got a great big sign, "Chief" on his.

"Please, please no wea' unifolm!" Lung pleads. "I got fixee nice!"

"Lung's right," Ham agrees. "If we wear our uniforms for practice, we're apt to soil 'em. Let's keep 'em in bandbox condition. We'll outshine them Buckstrap dudes like a hot-blooded stallion outshines a range broomtail!"

"Yes, my good men," Dr. Colorado speaks up, "thanks to my system of physical training, we are going to outrun and out-fire-fight the Buckstrappers! But, gentlemen, may I make a suggestion?"

"Shore."

"I understand that there has always been a great deal of bickering that ended in a free-for-all fight over the bets made on your annual fire-fighting contest," Dr. Colorado offers, smooth as goose grease. "I suggest that we have a betting booth. We will name Banker Willis, from Buckstrap, and Banker Harvey, from Sweetgrass, as betting commissioners. They will operate the booth. All bets will have to be put up in spot cash at the booth. The bankers will seal the money in envelopes. The bankers can change any gold or silver money to paper for the purpose."

THAT last sentence, which the doctor adds as an afterthought doesn't strike me as odd then.

"Then, after the contest has been decided by the judges," the doctor goes on, "the bankers can give the winning betters their envelopes, which will contain their stake, and the money they have won."

"Simple, and good!" Ham agrees, catching my nod. "It will prevent a lot of side fights."

We write Sheriff Rawson of our proposal, and get a reply right back agreeing to the betting booth to be run by the bankers. Too quick, but I don't smell no rat then.

Sweetgrass is all decked out in bunting like a rodeo town the day before the Labor Day contest. Ranchers are pitching their camps down near the river. Every buckaroo that can leave the range mogs into town to see the show. The whole bunch are betting their bottom dollars. It's bigger than Fourth of July!

But Ham ain't sharing the glad spirit of the occasion. He drags his spurs into the back room where Lung and I are finishing our dinner. As dejected and crestfallen as a crow with the double pip, he slumps into a chair with a great sigh. The man is completely throwed.

"Any of the boys developed charley hoss?" I ask, anxious.

"Nope, but, Egg, we're sunk!" Ham moans, dismal. He tugs at his drooped mustache. "Read me the rules of the contest."

"They're simple as A.B.C.," I state. "We've built two mock houses twenty yards apart, and about three hundred feet from the river. The shacks are filled with an equal amount of straw, and soaked with an equal amount of kerosene. They are set on fire.

The alarm is then sounded," I go on. "The fire-fighters got to get out of bed, climb into their uniforms, run to the fire hall, and race with their fire-fighting cart to the fire. The first outfit to pump water from the river and put out the fire wins the contest."

"Yeah?" Ham eyes me with a pained expression like he's just et a sick oyster. "Yeah? Just how is the signed agreement worded? Does it say we

got to put out the fire with river water?"

"No-o-o," I drawl.

An anvil suddenly lights in the pit of my bread basket.

"The writing just reads that the fire-fighters who put out their fire first wins the contest. Naturally, they got to pump their water from the river to do it!"

"That's what you think!" Ham groans like a colicky calf. "Did it ever strike yuh queer that them Buckstrappers keep a tarp lashed tight over their hose cart? And why do two hairpins with sawed-off shotguns stand guard over it all the time?"

That anvil in my stomach commences to buck-jump and bounce like a rubber ball.

"Shenanigans?" I croak.

"Yep!" Ham moans. "Rawson's stole a march on us! We've been outsmarted! Last night while the guard's dozed, I peeked under the tarp. Buckstrap's fire engine is filled with a big copper tank of new-fangled chemical fire extinguisher!"

"No wonder they've been lined up at the betting booth offering ten to one!" I slump into a chair. "With their patent chemical fire-fighting outfit against our honest water, they can safely offer ten to one! We're sunk!"

"Yeah." Ham mumbles, his chin on his chest. "We're totally out-foxed!"

HIS dull lack-luster eyes watch Lung. Lung is busy ironing a batch of Dr. Colorado's stiff white collars. The Chinese takes a mouthful of liquid from a bottle and sprays it between his teeth onto the limp collar ahead of his big flatiron. The iron sizzles on the damp collar, which curls up behind it stiff as a board.

Ham commences to worry his mustache. A gleam starts to dance in his eyes. And over my pardner's face comes the sly expression of a fox seeing a nester leave his henhouse door open.

Ham's experiencing one of his attacks of wisdom!

"Lung, what's this stuff?" Ham cries.

He dashes across the floor and picks up the bottle of liquid Lung is spraying on the collars. Lung points to a five gallon can labeled:

CONCENTRATED QUICK-SET
A Starch Substitute That Sets
Like Cast Iron

"Yippee!" Ham howls like a prospector uncovering a sudden bonanza. "Yippee! Come on, Lung!"

Like a bat out of Hades, my pardner grabs the can of patent starch in one hand, and the startled Chinese in the other, and dashes out into the night.

And me. I've seen these attacks of wisdom before. I grain our two best broncs and tie them near the outskirts of town. If that flutterhead's plan backfires, we may have to pull our picket pin and sprint for parts unknown in a hurry. . . .

Labor Day is like a fiesta. All over town waddies are arguing about the merit of the Buckstrap and Sweetgrass firemen as though they were race hosses. I pass among the hairpins collecting hardware. Because for private reasons I figger it's best.

The two bankers running the betting booth do a land-office business. Most of it is due to our Dr. Colorado. He's standing on a soap box outside of the betting booth, and just as though he was barking a medicine show, he's trolling the fellers up to place their bets.

"Hurry—hurry—hurry!" He orates. "Step right up, gentlemen, before it is too late. Don't be bashful! Come, you Sweetgrass buckaroos, show your faith in our nimble-footed fire laddies. Don't let this Buckstrap money go uncovered! They are offering two to one! Step right up, my Sweetgrass friends! Two to one! It's your chance to make a fortune! Make a fortune like taking candy from a baby!"

"Shore! Step right up!" Sheriff Rawson shakes a fistfull of greenbacks in the air. "Here's some of that Buckstrap candy! It's two to one that we have our fire out before the Sweetgrass slewfooted snails commence to pump water! Any takers? Where's the sports? Any takers?"

Danged if it don't make me feel lower than a sheepherder! I'm ashamed to say it! But that two-to-one proposition has already cleaned out all of the Sweetgrass betting money. No one's got a dime left to put up to shut Sheriff Rawson's big bazzoo.

"Three to one!" Rawson rubs salt in our wounds. "Where is that so-called Sweetgrass sportin' blood? Come on, yuh tinhorns! I'll make it five to one!"

"I'll take it!"

I jerk around. Striding toward Rawson is my lunkheaded pardner, Ham. In his hand he's got a bouquet of greenbacks. As he passes, waving the money around, I sniff suspiciously.

Shore nuff, the money smells musty and moldy. I know where it's come from! It's the two hundred and fifty bucks me and Ham keep buried in a tin can outside of town, just in case we should ever have to slope out in a hurry. It's our emergency money. And something tells me we're going to need it pronto!

I GRAB Ham by a handful of vest and jerk him over to me.

"Yuh idiot!" I hiss in his ear. "You know they've got this fire-fighting contest in the bag with their new-fangled chemicals! What'n tarnation do you mean by bettin' our emergency money?"

"Ha!" Rawson cracks sarcastic, seeing me trying to hold up Ham's recklessness. "Sweetgrass pikers, eh? Sheriff, let the big fat tinhorn bet!"

"Who's a big fat tinhorn?" Ham jerks away from me and braces Rawson. "Take that back!"

"Well," Rawson insults, planting his feet and going into his gun-crouch, "yuh've taken off some tallow. So I'll take the fat part back!"

"Meanin' I'm still called a tinhorn?"

Ham's on his toes, his fingers hovering over his gun butts.

"Exactly!" Rawson taunts. "Exactly, Tinhorn!"

Ham's hands start their hip dive. A sudden shot blasts the air. Ham's hat sails off his head, just as Dr. Colorado charges into Rawson like a mountain goat, sprawling him before he can slap walnut. I jerk my cutter, thumb back the hammer, and whirl toward the sound of the shot.

In the betting booth, Banker Willis, of Buckstrap, has got his six-gun throwed down on us.

"No gun play, boys!" he barks. "Want to set off a riot? We've got almost six thousand dollars bet here! Feeling is high. It's a fine example you lawmen are setting!"

"Right as rain!" Dr. Colorado speaks up, playing the unexpected ace that's been dealt him. "The conduct of these peace officers is most disgraceful! They've disarmed every cowboy in town! Even the judges have had to turn in their firearms for pick handles. Since our officers do not seem to have the necessary self-control, I move that they be disarmed like everyone else!"

Well, the up-shot is that Rawson, me, and Ham have to shelve our guns. It leaves only the bankers in the betting booth with a six-gun apiece for protection.

"I'm still claimin' that five to one brag yuh made, Rawson!" Ham persiss. "Cover my two-fifty with twelve hundred and fifty dollars cash money!"

Ham counts out his *dinero*, and Rawson, grinning like the cat what's eating the canary, does the same. The bankers seal the money in an envelope and toss it into the overflowing box. They got every loose dollar in both

counties right there in that booth!

"You catch 'em mo' five dolla' fo' my one dolla'?"

It's Lung, who's left his laundry and slap-slapped in his felt slippers up to the betting booth.

"Shore!" Rawson waves around what's left of his bankroll. "Want to bet a dollar, Lung? But I warn yuh. Yuh ain't got a Chinee's chance of winning!"

"Maybe so. Maybe no. How muchee that?"

Without blinking, Lung points a long yellow finger at Rawson's fistful of money.

"About fifteen hundred dollars!" Rawson replies.

"I takee!"

Calmly Lung reached up the flowing sleeve of his silk blouse and pulls out a tight roll, from which he peels three one-hundred-dollar bills. That money came too hard for Lung to bet reckless! What's up?

Before Rawson's winter molasses gray matter can evolve suspicion, Dr. Colorado barks:

"Lung, have you got my boiled shirt ready for the Fireman's Ball tonight? If it isn't ready in time, I'll cut off your pigtail and give you a quirting! Get going!"

"I fixee! I fixee!"

Lung tosses his money to the betting commissioners, and commences to trot off in the direction of his laundry.

"Hey, ain't yuh goin' to see the fire-fightin' contest?" Ham calls.

"Nope. Got fixee shirt fo' docto'!"

WELL, they're finally ready for the contest. So it will be like a midnight fire alarm, the smoke eaters are bedded down under the watchful eyes of the judges. The Sweetgrass fellers are in the dormitory, and the Buckstrappers are tucked in cots in the general store across the street. Their gaudy uniforms are all laid out. Nervous as cats, they anxiously await the signal.

A cry goes up from the spectators as a match is set to the oil-soaked mock buildings. The fire alarm clangs. The contest is on!

Like an eruption, the firemen throw their blankets into the air, jump into their uniforms. Still buttoning, they hurl themselves out of the door, racing pell-mell for the firehouse.

The Sweetgrass Volunteers are first to line out. Down main street they dash, heads low, legs churning as the brave red fire cart bumps along behind in a cloud of dust. Like a cyclone, they sprint for the river, and drop their suction hose into the water. Another pair tosses off lengths of hose. Working like beavers, they commence to couple them together.

The pumpers jump to their position, whipping the handle of the pump up and down at a furious rate. It's their job to have water at the nozzle the second the last length of hose is coupled up. Already the hose is swelling and crawling with water as Ham twists on the bright brass nozzle and advances toward the crackling building. Even without Dr. Colorado there to coach them, they make record time.

Until later, I don't realize he ain't around.

Ham's got water on his fire before the Buckstrappers draw up to theirs. They shore ain't extending themselves. At a comfortable dog-trot, they pull their tarp-covered fire cart alongside of their blazing mock house.

With a grandstanding flourish, they throw back the tarp. A dismayed gasp goes up from the Sweetgrass betters. They realize Buckstrap has stolen a march on them. For, just as Ham told me, cradled in the center of their fire cart, in place of the water pump, is a big copper tank labeled:

CHEMICAL FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Ham's so throwed at the sight of the chemical apparatus that the nozzle he's holding gets plumb out of control. His stream of water arcs across the space between the fiercely

burning buildings and douses the Buckstrap Fire Department good and plenty.

The dripping Buckstrappers drop their work. Fists sawing, they charge for Ham. The Sweetgrass boys rally around Ham. For a minute melee's like a howling pack of hounds making mincemeat out of a dozen timber wolves.

The alert judges, their pick handles swinging, charge into the ruckus. They soon drive the battling firemen back to their blazes.

Ham skilfully squirts his stream of water at the base of the flames, working his way around and around the mock house. Rawson and his dripping Buckstrappers grandstand with their chemical fire extinguisher. They act as though they are at a picnic. Leisurely, they uncoil the small hose from the chemical tank. The members of the team gather around Sheriff Rawson, who holds the nozzle.

Confidently, they prance in a bunch right up to the burning building. The sprinkling down my vacuum-headed pardner gave 'em actually works to their advantage! In their soaking wet uniforms, they are able to get much closer to the flames! And are they happy! Our bet money is already as good as in their pockets.

Rawson waves mockingly at sweating Ham. With an elaborate twist of his wrist, Rawson flips wide open the nozzle valve. The stream from the chemical tank arcs onto the blazing building. Our goose is cooked!

BUT no! What happens in the next few minutes goes down in Stweetgrass history as the greatest piece of skull work—or skullduggery—ever to happen in these parts!

For when that jet of liquid hits the burning building, a billowing roar of flame shoots skyward! An inferno flash of searing heat drives the crowd back! A dense white cloud of steam rolls up from the damp uniforms of the amazed Buckstrap firemen. They give vent to an agonized roar of rage as they realize they've been outfoxed!

Rawson's mouth flops open like a fly-trap. The hose drops from his hands. As the blistering heat strikes through their steaming uniforms, the whole bunch commence to jump up and down comical, like a chicken that's flew in the window and lit on a hot stove.

They panic back from the withering blast. But they don't take over half a dozen steps before they seem to freeze in their tracks.

Their arms and legs are suddenly transfixed in rigid stiff positions. Sweat streams off their agonized faces as they struggle to move. But, as though they've been hypnotized, they can't even wiggle!

Ham sprints to the chemical tank and closes a valve. Then, like a bowling ball making a ten-strike, he bounds among the suddenly fossilized Buckstrap smoke-eaters, giving each a shove. Stiff as cordwood, they crash to the ground, where they lay like logs.

Racing back to his fire, Ham puts it out. And for good measure, he commences to extinguish the Buckstrapper's fire. Ham and his boys are bowing to the bewildered spectators who are being held back by the judges when two quick shots jerk everyone around.

They've come from the betting booth!

Banker Harvy is rooted to the spot, his trembling hands skied! Banker Willis is bellied across the counter, his still smoking gun in the dust at his feet. A red stain is spreading high on his shoulder.

And facing us, with a .45 boring into the completely disarmed crowd, is our Dr. Colorado! Only he's no longer dressed in his high-faluting clothes! In waddy gear, he's handling his menacing six-gun in a way that tells us he ain't no amateur stick-up man.

"Gentleman Lumper!" Ham croaks, suddenly guessing the truth. "The outlaw!"

"Certainly!" Lumper's lips curl in a proud smile. "Before I embarked upon a career of crime, I used to run a medicine show! Pulling the wool over your eyes was easy! Sorry, gents, *I'm* collecting all the bets. I thank you one and all for making it so convenient for me!"

Laughing sarcastically, Gentleman Lumper leaps the counter and forces Banker Harvy to stuff all the money-filled bet envelopes into a grain sack. Then, stooped in a low gun-crouch, he commences to slither backwards toward the hitching-racks.

Weaving, bent low, his alert gun bearing down on us, Gentleman Lumper is watching for a hide-out gun. But there ain't none.

Chung is creeping forward toward the outlaw. Gliding low to the ground, silently as a stalking black panther, the half-pint Chinese is steadily closing the gap.

Directly in Gent Lumper's path Lung halts. He hugs the ground, letting the unsuspecting low-crouched outlaw weave backwards toward him. Ten paces. Five. Then two! The suspense is agonizing. The crowd holds its breath.

What can a poor unarmed, meek Chinese do to the ruthless outlaw?

Lumper's next backward step will fall on Lung's body. He will stumble, then drive two enraged shots into the Oriental's prostrate form!

But no! Lung suddenly raises his arm. And in his hand is his huge flatiron! Quickly, he jams the sizzling hot iron firmly on that part of bent-

**The larrupin' lawmen of Sweetgrass fight to clear the name of a waddy railroaded to the pen in HAM GOES TO THE DOGS, coming next issue!**

I gnash my teeth. Me and Ham are throwed for fair! We'll be the laughing stock of all Montaner. For six weeks we've had a badly wanted outlaw in the palms of our hands. And now, like melted butter, he's slipping between our fingers!

Gent Lumper is backing toward the hitching-racks. He'll pick the best mount for himself, and stampede the rest. It'll be an hour before we can catch up the broncs, pass out the collected guns, and start a posse.

Lumper nears the hosses. Swaying in his low crouch, he's carefully planting one foot at a time behind him. He's slow and deliberate, his gun sawing, and his roving eye flashing the crowd in front. Gent's taking no chances. It's the haul of a lifetime.

SUDDENLY, my heart leaps into my throat and flops like a trout out of water!

Behind Lumper, slippered Lung

over Lumper's levis that ain't protected by chaps!

With a screeching, agonized howl, Lumper lets his hammer fall. The guns buck out of his astonished grip. He drops the sack with the money and claps both hands behind. Jumping up and down he fills the air with harrowing moans, like a tenderfoot that's set on a cactus.

Ham, unscrewing the brass nozzle, charges forward, swinging it like a war club. Lumper makes a bee-line for the nearest cayuse. He leaps aboard the pitching bronc pony express.

When that part of his anatomy that came in contact with Lung's hot iron hits the leather, Gentleman Lumper lets out a mighty ungentlemanly howl. Standing straight in his stirrups, he lines out of town faster than blue blazes.

Ham steps up on the nearest bronc. Thundering after Lumper, Ham

closes the gap between them. He leans over, swings the brass nozzle like an Injun skull cracker, and sprawls Lumper senseless in the dust. Picking up the money sack, Ham trots to where the judges are waiting.

"In the name of Sweetgrass, I lay claim to all this bet money!" Ham says, his face as guileless as a baby lamb's. "There's only one simple rule to this contest. The outfit gettin' their fire out first is the winner!"

"That's a fact!" the head judge says. "Sweetgrass wins!"

There's an awful yelping from the Buckstrappers, who have gathered around their helpless prone fire department. I run over to see why they can't move anything except their tongues—which is plenty!

FROM the downright shameful language they're using, I gather the whole Buckstrap Fire Department think they've been hornswoggled!

Perhaps they're right. Something is danged queer! For their grand and gaudy uniforms are stiff and rigid as sun-dried rawhide! They are as helpless as though they were encased in suits of armor with all the joints rusted tight.

"Why, Sheriff Rawson," Ham crows with the hypocritical sad expression of a cowman at a sheepherder's funeral, "yuh shore seem to have a bad case of chemical rigor mortis! They'll have to cut off yore flashy uniforms with tin snips! And ain't that just too bad!" My pardner rolls his eyes plumb pious. "They were so pretty before they went and got all stiff! What in the world do yuh suppose caused it?"

Our Sweetgrass fellers, who have won plenty of *dinero,* put on a bang-up Fireman's Ball, with Ham and Lung as the guests of honor. They treat them right royally. And being Ham's superior officer, so to speak, I horn in on all the invites.

It is just about dawn as me and Ham weave toward our shack. We got to walk in the street because the sidewalk won't hold us. Ham's tin fireman's hat is cocked down over his right eye. In a rusty voice that makes the coyotes slink back into their holes in shame, my pardner's howling that song:

> There shore was a hot time in the ol' town!

"Ham," I say, shaking my trigger finger under his nose so's he'll stop his caterwauling, "what in tarnation made them Buckstrappers' uniforms go stiff as iron as soon as the heat struck 'em?"

Ham grins owlish and digs a playful finger in my ribs.

"Remember seein' Lung ironin' Doc's collars?" Ham asks. "It was his concentrated quick-set starch substitute that made 'em cast-iron stiff. That gives me an idear. But first I have to get rid of the guards.

"So I tie a fancy hair ribbon on Lung's pigtail, and make him put on a woman's dress we swiped from a clothesline. In the dark he passes the fire station dressed in all that finery. He throws a flirt at them Buckstrap guards. Like steers goin' to a lick of salt, they desert their post and follow Lung—until he gives 'em the slip.

"But that gives me plenty of time to drain their chemical tank and refill it with coal oil. I also dip their uniforms in that concentrated starch substitute. By mornin' they're dry, without a trace.

"Egg," Ham goes on owlish, "it was no accident I turned my hose on them Buckstrappers. Because when the heat of the kerosene they squirted from their chemical tank hits their damp starch-substitute-filled uniforms, the cloth sets up like cement. They're helpless as clams—but not so silent!"

"I knowed all the time it was some shenanigan of you and Lung's!" I nod.

"Yep!" Ham yawns. "Clever people, them Chinese!"

# AMERICA'S SUPREME TASK

## *A Message to the Home Front*

By

LT. GEN. BREHON SOMERVELL

THIS WAR is going to be won by fighting men—by men on blazing deserts, on northern wastes; by men fighting in the air and on scattered seas. Wherever the enemy is, our fighting men will attack and attack until victory is won.

The supreme task of all behind the battle lines is to provide the guns, the tanks, the planes, the ships, the equipment to make our fighting men strong and irresistible. They can fight and win, if we are certain that no second is lost in producing and sending them the weapons and the supplies so urgently needed now and until the final shot is fired that destroys the Axis.

A long, hard struggle faces us. Some few still talk despairingly of the need for greater sacrifices, of the little things that we must forego, of changes in the everyday habits of life of the civilian population.

Those at home, in factories, in fields, in the thousands of jobs the national effort requires, are demonstrating every day through selfless service their willingness and determination to concentrate all energies on winning the war.

The spirit of America is one of our greatest assets. It stems from an abiding faith in our way of life which we shall preserve and expand. This spirit is an asset which the whip-driven Axis powers do not possess, and never can. Only free men and women can own such a precious treasure.

You on the home front and we in the Army are a team. Our goal is victory. Let us not delude ourselves. We haven't had too much success so far. Let us not indulge in the luxury of wishful thinking. Our foe is strong and resourceful. This is no Saturday afternoon football game. It is a grim and deadly business.

Sweat, fortitude, unfailing devotion to daily tasks, no matter how trivial they may seem—these are the ingredients of victory.

Our fighting men are on the march in far-flung regions of the world, striking with unexampled courage at the enemy. They won't fail you.

Give 'em firepower!

LT. GEN. BREHON SOMERVELL,
*Services of Supply,*
*Commanding.*

# SIX-GUN DOUBLE TALK

## By TOM GUNN

*Painted Post is in the soup when Chow Now leaves the kitchen to hit the owlhoot—until Sheriff Blue Steele and Deputy Shorty Watts cook up a scheme that serves justice piping hot!*

### CHAPTER I

*Chow Now's Surprise*

EVERYBODY in Painted Post ate at Chow Now's, across from the jail. It was the only eatery in town. But if there'd been a dozen places, they would have stuck with Chow Now. He lent them money when they were short. He washed their clothes. He consoled them with quaint Oriental proverbs in times of trouble.

He dispensed these favors so cheerfully that nobody had the heart to kick about his food. That is, not until that January morning when Doc Crabtree was crankier than usual with an attack of indigestion.

"Fried eggs, fried spuds, fried bacon, fried everything!" sputtered the Doc as he poked fussily at his breakfast. "Ain't the old highbinder got anything but a frying pan?"

"What more d'yuh want, Doc?" mumbled Shorty Watts, the little redheaded deputy, as he stabbed another layer of flapjacks. "Anything a feller can eat and hold down is good grub, I claim."

"You're about as choosey as a buzzard!" snorted the Doc.

"Hold on there," Thimble Jack called from the doorway. "I bet Chow Now could put on a Chink banquet if he had the proper fixin's." He turned back to the lunch counter after a hasty glance for stray customers at his saloon.

"Shark fins and pickled rats and such?" helpfully suggested Dictionary Smith. And the little saloon swamper rocked with silent mirth.

"There's more to real Chinese cookery than that, you ignoramus!" Doc Crabtree declared. "Ever taste bamboo shoots, tofu, dried shrimps?"

Dictionary hadn't.

"Or shredded duck à la mandarin, soyu, preserved ginger? When I lived up in San Francisco—"

"Sounds like some Chink herb doc-

Riding closer now Steele emptied one Colt, then the other at the three outlaws still outside the house!

tor's concoction," Thimble Jack broke in again. "Mebbe Chow Now's got a remedy for stummick trouble. How about it, Chow Now?"

Tossing another flapjack, the leathery-faced little Chinaman grinned.

"You bet. Workum back more'n belly. That fixum."

THE laugh was on Doc Crabtree. But the booming voice of his card-playing crony, Judge John Bertram, didn't chime in.

The white-haired, ruddy-jowled T Bar T owner got up slowly from the lunch counter.

"Put it on the cuff, Chow Now. Until the Army pays me for that fall beef shipment, I'm busted."

"Too bad," sympathized Chow Now. "How muchee?"

"A heap more'n you got, old-timer. Twenty-one hundred dollars."

Chow Now turned, his black eyes sharply intent.

"Hm-mm. Muchee plenty b i g money, you bet!"

Magpie Stevens, the gap-toothed, talkative stage driver looked up with the manner of a man about to dispense words of great wisdom.

"Shouldn't wonder but what that money's up at Cottonwood now, Judge."

A flapjack was burning. But Chow Now was too interested to notice it.

"Yup, last trip up they told me at Wells Fargo that a gold shipment was due from Fort Bowie."

Judge Bertram was definitely cheered. The talk got around to fancy Chinese dishes again, and nobody noticed Chow Now slip off his apron and disappear out of the back door of his shack.

Not until Sheriff Blue Steele, a few moments later, looked across toward the feed corral, where Magpie had gone to harness his stage team.

"Looks like that dig o' yores got under Chow Now's hide, Doc," he observed. "Painted Post is losin' a cook."

The others stopped talking and craned. Chow Now, his queue neatly coiled under a little flat hat he seldom wore, was waiting at the corral gate. His hands were tucked in the loose sleeves of a black, brocaded blouse.

The lunch counter emptied as the breakfast crowd swarmed across the street.

Chow Now sensed the cause of the commotion.

"Me come back, when stage come back," he assured them.

"Little vacation, huh?" gusted Doc Crabtree.

Chow Now considered his answer carefully as he hunched thin-clad shoulders against the wet, gusty morning.

"Mebbe you all ketchum big s'plise."

"I'm surprised at 'you all.' That's southern talk."

"You bet! Me flum south China," grinned Chow Now as he made for the stage, climbed inside and shut the door.

Magpie, swathed in a slicker, swung to the high driver's seat and cracked his whip.

The sixty-mile journey northward to the railroad began.

ABOUT dusk of the following day the mud-splattered Concord coach returned under a weepy rain. The Judge and Doc Crabtree were at pinochle in Thimble Jack's place. The Judge leaped up and rushed eagerly outside. His face went blank. No strong-box was lashed behind the driver's perch. He scowled a silent question at Magpie as the gap-tooth driver stepped down to the platform sidewalk.

"Yore money was at Wells Fargo, all right," he said. "I started with it. In gold coin, it was. Purty to look at."

"Well, where is it now?" fretted Bertram.

Magpie serenely stuffed a chew of finecut into his mouth.

"I been robbed," he said blithely, as though dismissing a topic of small importance.

Judge Bertram nearly popped out at the seams. His claws-hammer eyebrows bristled and the blue eyes under them shot sparks.

"Robbed!" he whooped. "Good Godfrey, road agents?"

His voice roused the town like an explosion. The crowd in Thimble Jack's boiled outside. Steele came down with long strides from the jail office. Magpie waited until the sheriff came before he calmly related what had happened:

"I'd just stomped on the brakes at the top of the rimrock grade when two masked hombres rode out of a draw. One grabs the leader's bits. The other comes at me with a six-gun. 'It's a holdup, you moldy has-been,' says he. 'Toss down that strong-box!'"

"Thunderation, did yuh?" roared Bertram.

MAGPIE spit over the hitchrail. "What would you do if somebody pointed a forty-five at yore brisket? Sass him?"

The judge groaned and grabbed a porch pillar for support.

"What'd Chow Now do?" demanded Doc Crabtree.

"I reckon he didn't even poke out his head. Bet the old heathen's still skeered stiff."

Steele flung open the stage. Shorty had arrived and he gaped past the sheriff.

"Migosh!" he piped shrilly. "It—it's empty! Chow Now, he's missin'!" The others milled around, peering into the stage and clamoring for Magpie to explain. Steele pushed out of the group. He jerked out just two words.

They were meant for Shorty.

"Saddle up!"

They were up at the feed corral, had the sheriff's fine steel-dust gelding and Shorty's pinto under leather and spurted out of town before Magpie extricated himself from his excited fellow townsmen and was aware of their swift departure.

DEPUTY SHORTY WATTS

"Goldarn it, why didn't the sheriff give me a chance to finish?" he complained. "I was gittin' around to how I plum outwitted them holdups!"

"How?" bellowed Bertram. "How? Talk up, yuh long-winded galoot!"

Puffed with importance, Magpie fanned them away. He bent his shoulders and stepped inside the stage. It swayed and creaked as he stirred agitatedly around.

He popped out, his swaggering triumph turned to alarm.

"That goldanged Chinaman!" he yelled. "He was in cahoots with the holdups!"

He flung a helpless look toward the departing lawmen. Shocked silence gripped his listeners.

Chow Now, everybody's friend, trusted and liked . . . it was hard to believe.

Doc Crabtree voiced what everybody was thinking:

"Made up his mind to ride to Cottonwood mighty sudden. Took a sharp interest in what was said about your money shipment, Judge, I happen to recollect."

"So this," Judge Bertram said strickenly, "is the big surprise he promised! Good Godfrey!"

## CHAPTER II

### *"Chop Sueyside!"*

IT WAS dark as Steele and Shorty reached the Caliente ford, five miles from town. But a churning noise told them that the river was running high and fast. Crossing was risky. But when the law rode, risks had to be met. Steele kneed the gelding into the current and the pinto followed.

At mid-stream both animals struggled frantically for foothold. They barely managed to gain secure ground on the opposite bank before the powerful flow swept them to disaster.

"Whew!" breathed Shorty as the horses scrambled to safety. "That was a close one! Another half hour and we'd never make it!"

He realized, even as he spoke, that this had been Steele's reason for the hurried ride from town. The lean, swift-thinking sheriff, had realized that by waiting till morning they might be blocked from the fugitive trail. But that did not brighten the prospect of a long and comfortless night in the rain. Shorty shuddered at the thought.

"What in creation happened to Chow Now, Sheriff?"

"Got any theory, *segundo?*"

"Well, the judge is apt to hop to a mighty unpleasant conclusion."

Steele was unresponsive. It was useless to guess what he was thinking. Always a man of few words, he was closer-lipped than ever on a crime chase. He would ponder silently over each clue and follow it relentlessly to the end.

The rimrock summit was some twelve miles farther on. As they pushed through the darkness, heads bent to the storm, Shorty reflected on what twenty-one hundred dollars in gold looked and hefted like. It was rich booty for the border country. One-tenth that sum in beef on the hoof would be a handsome rustler's prize.

At last they reached the rimrock barrier, where the high plateau of central Arizona broke away into a desert basin watered by the Caliente. The road snaked upwards in a series of switchbacks, and as they left the floor of the desert, the wind and cold increased. Rounding the last hairpin bend, the gelding's sensitive nostrils fluttered a warning.

Steele reined up. He gripped his twin white-butted Colts. Tensely he listened for the tiniest sound. There was only the sigh of the wind along the rugged rim and the soft seething of the rain.

Shorty edged close.

"That draw where it happened is hardly a hundred yards ahead, Sheriff," he hissed guardedly.

Steele dismounted. Looping the gelding's reins over an arm, he approached the holdup scene with slow caution, guns still at ready. The gelding shied as they neared it.

Steele had learned to trust the animal's keen awareness, and at the mouth of the draw he stopped. It was sheltered in there, dwarfed trees clinging to the north slope.

"Strip some dry under bark from a juniper, *segundo*," he ordered. "Let's have a fire. And a looksee around."

"If there's any tracks, they've been purty much washed out," Shorty said.

AFTER a few tries, Shorty got a small fire going. Steele squatted, warming his hands by the feeble blaze, preparatory to getting the makings from a pocket of his calfskin vest. He threw back the poncho that covered his shoulders and slowly built a cigarette.

Shorty hunkered down beside him, tilting his head to let rain trickle from his hat brim. Bivouac was no new ex-

perience for them. Their lives had been spent out of doors. In camps such as this they had been drawn together in a bond of comradeship more powerful than a blood tie. Under friendly stars a man's soul could expand and reach lofty heights.

But a wet, black night yielded only discomfort. Shorty pushed himself erect, lopped the pinto's reins over Steele's saddle horn, and broke down some dead, brittle juniper limbs. He laid these on the fire as Steele lighted his cigarette. The pitchy fuel took hold and the firelight widened.

Steele's granite-gray eyes probed the blackness beyond. A heap that had looked like a boulder before took on new form, a few steps up the draw. A tight dread gripped his throat as he made out the huddled shape of a man. He pointed grimly. With a cry Shorty beat him to the body.

The head lolled unnaturally under a wide hat, giving a glimpse of a chicken-white face under a thin, scraggly beard. Steele jerked off the hat. It was a ghastly sight. The body was slumped in puddled gore. A rigid hand touched an empty holster, and a bandanna mask lay a few feet away.

Hardened as they were to death, and violence, Steele and Shorty were momentarily stunned. Shocked and awed, even Shorty was wordless for a while.

"Well," he finally croaked, "it wasn't exactly a lingerin' end, was it? What brand of murder d'yuh reckon hit this customer?"

"It wasn't murder," Steele said slowly. He straightened, keen eyes fastened on a flat object half-buried in mud. "Chop sueycide, I'd call it."

He went to the object and picked it up. Shorty stared at a brand-new razor-keen meat cleaver. A limp price tag dangled from the eyelet. Steele peered at it.

"Chow Now done a little shoppin' up Cottonwood way."

"Yuh figger Chow Now sent this feller snazoo?"

Steele dragged at the cigarette.

"A Chinaman is apt to pack most anything up those big sleeves."

"Magpie said one hombre held the stage horses while the other tended to the strongbox. That'd give Chow Now time to slip out of the yonder side of the stage, wouldn't it?" chattered Shorty. "But why didn't the other hold-up shoot him when he made a swipe at this one?"

"Magpie was still within hearing."

Another possibility suggested itself to Shorty.

"Migosh, he shore must of gunned Chow Now when he got him out of earshot, then!"

Steele's rock-hard eyes glinted.

"If so, Arizona Territory won't be big enough to hold his killer," he vowed grimly.

"Seems yuh're more worried about him than the judge's money."

Steele turned towards the fire.

"Chow Now was good people. He was a better man than a heap of whites that inhabit this country. Ever hear of him turnin' away a man that was broke and hungry?"

"Well, he got over bein' softhearted this once. Also, with Chow Now bein' so reckless with his own money, how come he'd go around whackin' off heads on account of Judge Bertram's money?"

IF STEELE had an answer, he didn't bother to give it. He replenished the fire and squatted again. Shorty joined him, exhibiting a handful of .45 loads.

"The dead man's holster was empty but his gun-belt wasn't," he said.

"You'll find use for extra cartridges before we see Painted Post again, *segundo*."

Shorty put them in his own belt loops, hunched his poncho over his neck and perched on a boulder. He had something to say but was reluctant to say it, because Blue Steele, who gave his friendship to few, was one of Chow Now's staunchest friends.

"Look, Sheriff," he presently blurted, "what happened after the Chinaman walloped this pore devil? He could of grabbed the strongbox and the man's gun, couldn't he? And his hoss?"

"Come daylight the tracks'll tell."

"But will they? The getaway trail will be blurred by an all night rain."

Steele reached for another smoke. As he rolled it, a bright speck between his feet attracted him. He picked it up and studied it between thumb and forefinger. It was a tiny white pellet.

"That chip of quartz rock won't solve no mysteries, Sheriff," said Shorty, nettled by the other's silence.

"Quartz?" Steele said it musingly. "Wrong, *segundo.* It's a grain of rice."

"Rice? Well, that proves somethin'! That's Chinaman sign all right!"

Steele drew an ember tip from the fire and touched it to the twisted end of his smoke. He gazed into the fire, busy with his own thoughts. Shorty, despairing of further conversation, dropped his head on his arms and dozed.

## CHAPTER III

### *Death in the Smoketree*

DAWN was seeping through low, murky clouds when Steele prodded Shorty awake. The little deputy stood up, stiff and weary-eyed. He saw a tin can in the hot ashes, steaming fragrance.

"Cawfee, migosh!" he exclaimed. "What else'd yuh dig out of yore saddle bags, Sheriff?"

"A pair of wire-cutters and some hossshoe nails, *segundo.*"

"Well, I'll take it straight."

He did. Then they mounted and single-filed up the draw, Steele in the lead. He halted and stooped.

"More rice?" chirped Shorty.

"And tracks of two hosses."

"Reckon that proves the other hold-up captured Chow Now, huh, Sheriff?"

"Your head's workin' better today, *segundo.*"

They moved more briskly now. The occasional sprinkling of rice showed plainly against the dark rocks. It led them out of the draw and across the open rimrock, where it contoured the brink, winding interminably past the heads of short, steep canyons.

The route led westward, where the rimrock curved widely, bounding the desert basin on the north. The rain had let up at daylight but it set in again now, coming out of sweeping mist—a fine drizzle which presently turned to a flurry of hail that danced on the rocks and lay melting under the sunless sky.

In a few moments the rice trail was hopelessly lost under these frozen pellets that exactly resembled the grain.

"That goes to show," glummed Shorty, "that yuh can't buck the weather. My notion is we better hole up somewheres."

Steele found quick interest in that.

"That's about what our man would of figured. And where would he hole up, *segundo?*"

"Nearest place is the Smoketree."

"Good headwork, *segundo!* We're headin' straight for it, yuh'll notice."

It wasn't the first time they had followed an outlaw trail to the Smoketree. It was a lonely sink on the back side of the lofty Sawtooths, a deserted ranch. Most of Smoketree Valley was a dry lake. On the edge toward the mountains stood the ruins of an old adobe house, near a *ceinega* where brackish water seeped to the surface amid mesquite hummocks. Men on the dodge through the Southwest knew the spot as a hideout.

Steele led the way into a lope now, until the rimrock broke away in a series of terraces that dropped to the dry lake. The hail passed and the clouds lifted. Pausing on a headland, Steele scanned the region below.

The "dry" lake, fed by countless washes filled with storm runoff was no longer dry. It was a vast, watery expanse.

"The bones of cattle that died there in dry seasons and bogged in it durin' wet ones don't make me crave to ride across," Shorty lamented.

In that interval of widened visibility, Steele's distance-piercing vision made out the old adobe.

"Smoke," he reported tersely.

"But Sheriff, whoever's holed up there, he'll see us flounderin' across that ocean-sized puddle!"

"We'll circle to the lower end of the lake and come up through the hummocks."

"I bet it's a dozen miles thataway!"

"Sooner we start, the sooner we get there. C'mon, *segundo.*"

As they started, the storm curtain lowered again and the adobe was lost in the mist. They rode hard and long but it was nearing midday before they found themselves in the hummocks.

THE silty mounds, built up through the ages by wind, were piled around mesquite clumps that rose to an average of twenty feet above the surrounding ground. They solved the problem of approaching the adobe in daylight.

When the two men neared the *ceinega,* Steele dismounted and made a wary reconnaissance. He returned to the horses thin-lipped and with puckered brow.

"The house is about five hundred yards. In between they've rigged a cavvy corral."

"They?" parrotted Shorty.

"Five hosses."

"Migosh! Then the pair that stuck up Magpie was just part of a outlaw band, huh?"

That was obvious. Steele dug into his saddle bags.

"The corral fence isn't much. Mesquite poles, two strands o' wire. This side closes in part o' the spring. There's tules and willow for cover. Here's the wire cutters."

Shorty understood.

"That cavvy'll be roamin' in seventeen directions right sudden," he promised.

He tethered the gelding to a mesquite snag and made a crouching stalk for the fence. He paused suddenly, sniffing.

"Grub a-cookin'!" he told himself. "Gosh, am I hungry!"

Steele had a lookout from a hummock. He sounded a low, tense warning. It was quickly followed by the hubbub of drunken, quarreling voices. Shorty scrambled onto the hummock and flattened himself beside Steele.

A man ran unsteadily out of the adobe, a pursuer on his heels. They met, tangled, fell and fought, clumsily but fiercely. Two others swayed out, cheering lustily.

As Steele and Shorty watched the fight a fifth figure slipped away from the front of the adobe, and streaked for deep-gullied ground to the east. He made remarkable speed, considering his burden, which was the size of a small, flat trunk. A pigtail streamed behind him.

"Chow Now!" blurted Shorty. "Him and the strongbox!"

A wide Sunday swing downed one of the fighters. He got up running, his assailant on his heels. He fled around the adobe, and there he weaved to a halt, flapped his arms wildly and yelled. The outcry brought his companions, and they whipped out revolvers. Chow Now, still running, was an easy target.

Steele was in saddle before Shorty knew it, streaking away from the hummocks toward the outlaws. He volleyed as he went. The range was almost too great, but the daring charge saved Chow Now. The four men scut-

tled for the house, and Chow Now, reaching a cutbank, leaped into it and vanished.

Riding closer now, Steele emptied one Colt, then the other at the three outlaws still outside the house. The hindermost man stumbled and fell. He got up and limped on to cover with slugs nipping at his heels.

As Steele charged, Shorty wriggled forward through the *ceinega* ooze. He cut and jerked away a section of fence, then rushed back to the pinto. He spurted through the opening he had made, and hazed the five horses out. As he finished, a rifle cracked from a gunnysack-covered window of the adobe and he felt the zip of a bullet past his face.

IT WAS a many-sided play now. Steele rode down into the cutbank to save Chow Now. Shorty's object was to draw fire away from Steele. The quartette behind the thick walls of the adobe were concerned mainly with keeping their hides whole. As for Chow Now, his evident purpose was to save the strongbox. He had pounced on the opportune confusion among the outlaws for his bold escape.

Shorty circled the house to the north as Steele patrolled the edge of the cutbank, evidently scanning its crooked course for the runaway Chinaman. The outlaw rifle talked again. Lead tugged at Shorty's wet sleeve. He poured answering lead at the burlap-covered window, where the rifle jutted. The weather-tattered sacking flapped, and the rifle was jerked out of view.

His trip around the house finally brought Shorty in sight of the far doorway. A rifle was now ominously braced against the casing. The little deputy spent his last two shots in that direction as he twisted half around in saddle.

At that juncture, his pinto reached the cutbank, swerved nimbly and Shorty was caught off-balance. He was hurled over the crest and landed with a huge splash in the shallow, muddy young river on the sandy bottom. The tumble saved his life. For the rifle cracked just as he took the header, and the bullet gouged the empty saddle.

Shorty's blunders were invariably lucky. This particular one was doubly so. From the house his fall looked like that of a hard-hit rider. It was so convincing, that two of the outlaws ran out from the house to capture the pinto as it capered along the rim of the cutbank.

Shorty floundered out of water, shaken but unhurt. He still clung tenaciously to his .45, and he cussed and reloaded as he huddled under the edge of the cutbank—an earth wall higher than his five-feet-two. With full six-gun he toed himself up. That brought him almost face to face with the two running men as they closed in on his pinto.

One saw him, cursed savagely and slammed down at point-blank range. Shorty beat him to trigger. The outlaw uttered an eerie death cry, folded and collapsed.

The other started a dodgy run back for the house. With elbow steadied on the rim of earth, Shorty sighted carefully and squeezed. His second victim fell forward full-length across a patch of beaver-tail cactus. He struggled jerkily as his life ebbed.

In those few seconds the odds against Shorty were whittled in half, and one of the remaining pair was wounded. The jutting rifle was no longer visible. Almost at once the reason was plain. The rifleman was making for the corral. Weaving after him was the injured man.

Shorty scrambled to level ground and caught up the pinto and stormed after the running enemy. At the corral gate the man with the rifle whirled and aimed. Shorty's .45 drummed three fast shots. He was surprised at his own sharpshooting, as the rifleman dropped to his knees, jabbing the rifle muzzle into the mud. Slowly

he fell forward, gripping his left side and groaning.

The injured outlaw never reached the corral. He had a six-gun but he threw it away as his hands shot over his head.

"I'm done!" he screeched as Shorty bore down on him. "Don't shoot!"

Shorty scooped up the six-gun, kneed the pinto on and got the rifle without leaving saddle. Then he returned to his captive.

"Who's left in the dobey?" he crackled.

"Nobody!"

"Back there, then!"

Shorty close-herded him. His man had been hit in the left calf, close to the boot top. He gusted sounds of pain past clenched teeth as he hobbled for the house. Shorty dismounted, dropped reins over a post and crowded the other inside.

"Where's the stage loot, Limpy?" he demanded.

"We didn't open the strongbox!" wailed the outlaw. "That dang Chink got it!"

## CHAPTER IV

### *"Simple as Two and Two"*

SHORTY and his captive entered a spacious, low-raftered room with a fireplace at one end and a littered plank table standing in the middle. On both sides of the fireplace were straw shakedowns and rumpled blankets. The wounded man flung himself on one of the pallets. He rolled up his pants leg, swabbed his bloody wound with a wet undershirt, then ripped the garment in strips and bandaged it.

A kettle simmered on the hearth. Shorty took a tin plate from the table and helped himself. He bit into a tough, stringy piece of dark meat.

"Jackrabbit!" he grumbled disgustedly. "You johnnies lived high, I must say!"

He ate what he could, then replenished the fire. He pulled up a bench, then stripped off his wet clothes and draped them on it to dry. The captive eyed the redhead's picked-sparrow physique.

"To think that a midget like you would rub out the Jarvis outfit!" he sniffled.

"Which one was Jarvis?"

"Jumpy Jarvis, that cussed Chink got him."

"Then it was you that brung Chow Now here."

"I figgered Chinks was easy to handle, if they was kept away from cleavers. The other mistake was not to open that strongbox and divvy it, like I wanted."

"Yuh follered the stage from Cottonwood, I reckon?"

"That's right. Seen that ugly old woodpecker of a driver git the money. Jumpy and me was up there after grub, but we bought likker instead when we seen—"

He paused and pawed a flask out from under a blanket. Shorty threw a boot as he raised it to his lips. It was a good throw. The flask crashed.

The outlaw blabbered oaths which trailed off into a yip of pain as the spilled whiskey soaked through his leg bandage and bit into raw flesh.

Hoofs sounded outside. Shorty grabbed his .45 and pattered to the doorway. It was Steele, dismounting. As he eyed Shorty's dazzling nudity, a smile flicked his thin lips.

"Saw yore paint-hoss. Knew it was the all-clear signal. Didn't expect to find yuh so relaxed, though, *segundo.*"

He lowered the strongbox from back of his saddle and with quiet triumph carried it inside and set it on the table. He produced two revolvers from under his calfskin vest and laid them beside it.

"See you left one for seed," he re-

marked, flicking a casual glance at the wounded outlaw.

"That's the one you nicked, Sheriff," said Shorty, hovering close to the fire. "Where's Chow Now?"

"Still on the go. Didn't look back to see he was among friends all of a sudden."

"Then how come the strongbox?"

"I stumbled onto where he'd stashed it, about a mile up the cutbank."

"Ain't that a purty awkward way to pack around a measly little ol' twenty-one hundred dollars, Sheriff?"

Steele answered by gripping the muddy rifle and sharply striking the padlock. At the third wallop it sprang open. He unhasped the lid and raised it. His face became a stony mask, as he dumped out the neatly-packed contents. Then in a tired, dull voice he catalogued the packages one by one:

"Bamboo shoots, tofu, dried shrimps, soyu, preserved ginger . . ."

Up on one knee, the captive stared open-mouthed. Then he broke out with jeering laughter.

BLUE STEELE walked slowly to a doorway. He stood there, back turned, as he rolled a cigarette. When he turned, the bitter disappointment was erased from his face. Shorty was climbing gloomily back into his partly-dried clothes.

"Looks like Chow Now outsmarted everybody," he said.

Steele reached for a firestick to light his cigarette. There was a deep pucker between his narrowed eyes. It had seemed strange that Chow Now had not looked back, during the fusillade, and recognized him and Shorty. Or had he? And in doing so, continued his flight? He wasn't ready yet to admit that he suspected Chow Now of double-dealing—of hijacking the stage loot.

"If anybody knows where Bertram's money is, it's Chow Now," he reasoned thoughtfully.

"Simplest way to find out is to collar that Chinaman!" Shorty blurted.

There was no denying that.

"Take charge of the guns, then, *segundo*."

The captive blinked uneasily.

"How about me?" he demanded. "Yuh can't leave me in this shape! I—I'll starve!"

"With all that nice jackrabbit stew?" Shorty said mockingly. "Also, bamboo shoots, dried shrimps—"

Steele was packing the strongbox.

"W're takin' the fancy fixin's along, *segundo*," he interrupted.

"Migosh, Sheriff, why?"

Steele shrugged.

"It's just a hunch. I might be wrong."

That wasn't very illuminating. Closing the lid, Steele carried the strongbox outside and tied it on his saddle cantle. Shorty stuffed the three captured six-guns into his belt. But he balked at carrying the rifle. There was a nail in the cantle. He pulled it out and by using a revolver butt for a hammer knocked out the rifle firing-pin. He left the useless weapon.

"It'll make yuh a good crutch, Limpy," he said.

Bristling with six-guns, he went outside. He followed Steele in silence to the spot where the sheriff had found the strongbox, hidden in a badger hole in the wall of the cutbank.

The rain was over. The clouds were lifting, and the runoff in the cutbank had dropped to a trickle. Chow Now's tracks were plain in the soggy ground, but trailing him was not so simple.

The country here was gashed by a maze of miniature, earth-walled canyons. An agile man could cross such a badlands without difficulty on foot. But few and far apart were the places where a horse could climb or descend the treacherous, crumbly banks. Tracking would be a slow, roundabout process.

Across one dip, into another, then up again they toiled for an hour, making hardly a mile. Then Steele reined up, measuring landmarks and direction with expert eye.

"He's makin' straight east for the stage road."

"If he follers that we'll nab him *pronto!*"

Steele nodded thoughtfully. He resumed the monotonous pursuit. Late afternoon brought them onto the stage road.

"We as good as got him now!" crowed Shorty. "He'll get far's the ford and there high water'll stop him!"

"Hold on, *segundo.* Yuh notice his foot tracks?"

Shorty took a look at the wet, rutty road. His eyes widened.

"Creation! He vamoosed north! Right back toward the rimrock!"

The ghost of a smile touched Steele's haggard cheeks.

"What's your theory now, *segundo?*"

It was a playful custom, treating Shorty as if he were a small child, a sort of game.

"Theory? I've run out of theories!" flared the little deputy. "And I'm plum tired of chasin' that slippery Chinaman around in circles! Also, I'm hungry! I'd dingle for town and a square meal right now if there was anybody to cook it!"

Steele stepped out of saddle and untied the strongbox.

"Hold on, I don't mean *that* kind o' grub!" Shorty cried hastily.

"We'll just sort o' file it here," Steele explained mysteriously as he cached it in a hackberry thicket, "for future reference."

He swung to saddle and started again—this time toward the north. Shorty spurred after him.

"You act like yuh had this whole affair all figgered out!" he fumed.

"Simple as two and two, *segundo.*"

"Not by my arithmetic, it ain't! And I don't savvy why yuh lugged them Chinaman groceries so far!"

"To go with the rice."

"Rice? What rice?"

A cryptic half-smile was the only answer.

SHORTY smouldered. He deserved more dignified treatment after his coup at the Smoketree, he thought. Three outlaws never again would hold up a stage. Tagging them with their own lead made it all the more of a feat. As he reflected on that episode, a startling thought exploded under his red topknot.

"Sheriff!" he jabbered. "Here's some more arithmetic! I got only three outlaw guns here in my belt! There was five holdups! The rifle—!"

Before he could finish Steele threw open his calfskin vest, flicked out a fourth captured six-gun and twirled it.

"Nice shootin' you done, *segundo,* even if you didn't add the guns up right. One o' the hombres you got at the cutbank had this other stinger. The one Jumpy Jarvis packed, I reckon."

"B-but why—?"

"That one you called Limpy looked snake-eyed when I laid two guns on the table. So I hung onto the third to find out if he was as bad hit as he let on."

"How?"

"When we tracked Chow Now I looked back. Sure enough, Limpy was out, searchin' his dead pals."

"Well, mebbe he ain't helpless. But he's sure enough unheeled an' harmless—"

Shorty hadn't finished that confident assertion before the thin, sharp crack of a rifle floated to them. They were nearing the foot of the rimrock grade, and the report seemed to come from the crest—from the spot where Magpie had been relieved of the strongbox.

Instantly their eyes tracked the sound. Sharp against the skyline, on a sorrel they recognized as one from the Smoketree corral, rode a too-familiar figure with a white-bandaged leg. As they watched he whipped the rifle to his shoulder and fired again.

"B-but I knocked out the firin'-pin with a nail!" yowled Shorty.

"And Limpy used the nail to make himself another firing-pin!" crackled Steele. "I hope that slip-up didn't cost Chow Now his hide! C'mon, *segundo!*"

## CHAPTER V

### *"Ketchum Lice!"*

LIMPY had managed to catch up a loose horse, that was evident. It was also evident that some powerful motive had drawn him back to the holdup scene. He had angled straight for it, along the base of the rimrock and up one of the short canyons. Unquestionably he had seen the lawmen approaching, and some desperate urgency sent him to triggering now.

Halfway up, as they swept around a bend, a partial explanation almost collided with Steele and Shorty. Chow Now was tearing down-grade with antelope-like leaps, bare-headed and with queue streaming out behind, stiff as a poker. Seeing them he slid to a breathless halt and flapped his arms.

"Ketchum lice!" he screeched as they tore past. "Ketchum lice!"

"Catch yore own lice!" shrilled Shorty.

But Steele understood the pidgin-English. The stronger, faster gelding forged ahead, sweeping around the final turn that brought him in sight of the draw where Jumpy Jarvis' body still huddled.

But on the opposite side of the road, amid a clutter of boulders, was a gleaming white patch that looked like a lonesome snowdrift. Steele came to a rearing halt and bounded from saddle.

That white patch was a spilled bag of rice. As Steele rushed to it, a long evening shadow was flung down from the rim above. He saw Limpy aiming a down-slanted rifle. The Colt barked in unison with the longer-reaching weapon. Limpy ducked and vanished, and Steele took cover in the tumble of boulders.

Shorty pounded past on the blowing pinto. He had seen the gunplay. But on he went, ignoring danger. When he came out on the crest, a wide view of the plateau beyond opened before him. The stage road reached out toward the far horizon. On a dead run along it, but now far beyond .45 reach, rode the fugitive.

Shorty groaned in despair. Here he was bristling with six-guns and a fagged horse under him. The pinto didn't have a spurt left in it. That reckless dash up the grade had it lathered, shaky, nearly spent.

AS HE was about to turn back and rejoin the sheriff, Shorty saw Limpy reel uncertainly in saddle. Had that swift, random shot of Steele's connected?

While the little deputy watched, the outlaw swayed, grabbed at leather and lost his hold on the rifle. It slid out of his hand and bounced to the side of the road.

With a yell Shorty heeled the pinto into motion again. Limpy flung a frantic backward glance. Only one choice was left him. He wheeled around, stumbled out of saddle and hobbled for the fallen weapon as Shorty charged.

It was a showdown now. Shorty dropped knotted reins over saddle horn and jerked a six-gun from his belt. He had seen Steele slambang into action many a time with two guns. He tried it now. Whooping and banging he fogged for the kneeling Limpy. Six-gun bullets sluiced the road, splattering mud and gravel.

Limpy was jarred off balance by the rifle's recoil. His aim was shaken just enough. The slug ripped past so close that Shorty unconsciously dodged.

The distance was right now. He couldn't miss the next shot. He

levered in a new load. Emptying both guns, Shorty hurled them away and whipped out the rest of his arsenal. The right-hand gun bucked and roared. The bullet gouged earth close in front of the crouched outlaw. He went over again, onto his back, the rifle flying out of his hands as he clutched his bandaged leg in both hands.

Shorty was on him now. He swung a leg over the saddle horn and hit the road running. He kicked the rifle well out of the floundering man's reach.

He saw then that jagged particles of a ricocheting .45 bullet had lacerated his victim's shin. The agony of that seemed greater than the reddening blotch low in his left side which had been tallied by the sheriff.

"Set up and talk!" Shorty rapped out. "You ain't got a whole lot longer when yuh can!"

Limpy sat up, moaning loudly.

"You got luck to make up for yore dumbness, runt!" he croaked weakly.

"You shore ain't got no brains to spare! What for was yuh interested in the Chinaman?"

The other gazed up, hollow-eyed and stricken, but with enough spirit to sneer: "You shore are empty-headed, half-pint! I knowed the second I seen what was in the strongbox!"

"Knowed what?" Shorty barked.

Limpy's blanched lips went obstinate. "Simple," he sighed huskily. "Simple as two and two. . . ."

His eyelids fluttered and he keeled over, unconscious. Shorty did a war dance. He was hopping mad to have that tantalizing phrase thrown at him again.

The pinto's reins weren't dropped. But the little paint horse wasn't in shape for spooky tricks. It stood, head down and legs trembling. Shorty didn't have the heart to mount. He gave it an encouraging pat and set out after the sorrel, pausing this time to take charge of the rifle.

The sorrel was up the road some two hundred yards. It, too, had been hard-ridden, and it cropped roadside grass, its sides heaving.

Shorty got to it and caught up a trailing rein. He went to mount. Then he saw Limpy crawl to his feet. The outlaw was swaying toward the pinto, both hands groping. He caught a handful of mane, gripped the saddle and lifted his bandaged leg torturingly for stirrup.

Shorty had to do it. He upped the rifle and squinted through the buckhorn sights. Limpy was heaving himself up as the rifle cracked. He flung himself backwards with a stricken scream. The pinto leaped, dragging the outlaw a few feet before the crippled leg left the stirrup.

When Shorty got to him he was limp and still. He was bored through, just under the arms. Shorty shook out his lariat, roped the last of the Jarvis gang onto the sorrel and jogged back toward the rimrock.

At the crest Steele met him. The long rays of a red sunset brought in bold relief his rugged countenance.

The sheriff must have seen the last outlaw's finish. But he spoke no word of praise. Yet Shorty knew that to others Steele would never cease to boast of the little deputy's fabulous feat, in his single-handed triumph over a quartette of hardened hombres.

"Two and two," quoted Shorty as they came together, "makes four bad ones that Arizona won't need to worry about no more."

Steele kneed the gelding around.

"Under that juniper is a handy place for this crook and Jumpy Jarvis," he said somberly. "The ground's soft from the rain. And Chow Now's doing the digging with that cleaver."

BESIDE the road where they had robbed the stage, the last of the Jarvis gang were buried. Then a weary trio turned their faces for Painted Post and home. Chow Now forked Limpy's sorrel, the bag of rice tied behind his saddle. He fussed because it had gotten rain-soaked.

"Must cookum lice or she go bad," he chattered.

"Migosh, that's a heck of a thing to be worryin' about!" exploded Shorty. "What we started out after was the judge's money!"

"What Chow Now started out for was a surprise Chinese feed," remarked Steele, "for the benefit of Doc Crabtree's stomach."

"Ain't anybody interested," blurted Shorty, "in benefittin' Judge Bertram's pocketbook?"

Steele smiled vaguely. "Don't worry about that gold, *segundo*," he said. "It was in the bag of rice."

CHOW NOW cackled at the little deputy's round-eyed amazement.

"Here's the story from the start," Steele explained. "When the outlaws halted Magpie, Chow Now slipped out of the stagecoach with that bag of rice."

"D-did he know—?"

"Sure. It was Magpie's bright idea. He saw Jarvis and his sidekick eyein' those golden eagles when they were handed over to Magpie at the Wells Fargo office. He took precautions by loadin' the strongbox with Chinese groceries, savvy?

"Anyhow, Chow Now got out of the stage and stashed the rice bag in the tumble of boulders, and then Jarvis saw him and ordered him up onto the road. Chow Now had the presence of mind to grab a pocketful of rice before he obeyed—to which we're indebted for bein' able to track him and Limpy."

"Yuh ain't mentioned the cleaver act!"

"Chow Now killed Jarvis because Jarvis was wise to where that bag of rice was hid."

"You bet!" agreed Chow Now, drawing a hand from a voluminous sleeve and brandishing the lethal instrument.

Shorty digested that information.

"All right, I got that straight. But how did Limpy figger out where the gold was hid, and come streakin' back to the rimrock to grab it?"

"I'd say the idea struck him the same time it did me. At the Smoketree, when he saw what the strongbox *didn't* contain."

Shorty mulled that over and reached the unflattering conclusion that he was dumb, as Limpy had said. Anyhow, he now understood the allusion to "two and two."

"Why didn't Magpie mention to us that he'd switched the golden eagles out of the strongbox?"

"The long-winded old galoot hadn't gotten around to that, I'd say."

They were out on the desert stretch by now, where Steele and Shorty had tracked Chow Now to the road. The sheriff reined up and dismounted. He strode to the thicket and returned, laden with the strongbox.

Chow Now released a string of outlandish gibberish. It was he who was astonished this time. Steele swung the box behind the gelding's saddle and secured it with the saddle thongs, then he paused to roll a smoke.

"The river'll be down by now. We should be back in town in an hour."

"In time for supper," said Shorty.

"Me cookum big supper chow!" enthused Chow Now. "Sheliff he blingum bamboo shoot, tofu, dly shlimp, soyu! Sheliff, him belly smart, you bet!"

As they rode onto the ford Shorty brooded.

"Everybody's smart but me," he sighed sorrowfully. "Magpie was smart when he hid the gold in the rice. Chow Now was smart when he stashed it. Jumpy Jarvis was smart to ketch him at it. Limpy was smart. Yuh're always smart, Sheriff. Me, I never know what's goin' on till it's all over. I'm just no brains."

"You bet!" Chow Now cheerfully agreed.

***Next Issue's Painted Post Novelet:*** **HATS IN THE DUST**

"Go ahead—touch that gun in the drawer," Whang challenged

# Guns of the Storm

## By GUNNISON STEELE

*Tired of running away, Ranny McCabe rides boldly into Blackwater Town for a Showdown with a framing sidewinder!*

IT WAS well after dark when lanky, tawny-haired "Whang" McCabe rode into Blackwater and tied his buckskin in an alley between two buildings. First thing, he went into "Hashknife Charley's" place and calmly ordered a big feed.

Slack-jawed with amazement, Hashknife brought out enough food for two ordinary men. Whang McCabe, he saw, was gaunt, weary-looking, like a wolf that had been on the run a long time. His clothes were torn and muddy, but the long-barreled six-gun he wore was shiny and clean.

Nervously, Hashknife Charley went to the front door and peered along the dimly lighted street. Then he drew the shades over the windows and returned to where Whang sat eating ravenously.

"Feller, yuh gone plumb loco?" he blurted.

"Mebbe," Whang said, his mouth full of steak. "Why yuh ask?"

"The law wants yuh—bad. Didn't yuh know Duke Talon's put a thousand-dollar bounty on yore scalp?"

"Yeah, I knew it."

"Then why in all— Look, feller—I'll put out the lights, and you sneak out the back way. Mebbe nobody's seen yuh yet."

"Not till I fill my belly."

"Yuh didn't have to come in here to do that. Yuh coulda tapped on the back door and I'da brought yuh all yuh wanted. I'll make yuh a pack now, then yuh line out of here."

Whang shook his head. "Nope. I got business here in town."

"What kind of business?"

"With Duke Talon."

Hashknife swore earnestly. "Yuh ain't got a chance, Whang—ridin' into town like this. If some of Talon's hard-case crew don't gun yuh, Sheriff Jim Blair'll slap yuh in jail. Besides, Talon ain't been in town all day. Reckon he's out at his ranch."

Whang McCabe grinned tautly. "Ain't no go, Hashknife. Besides bein' hungry and havin' business, I wanted a glass of cold beer. Shoulda seen to that first, but I was too hungry. All these days and nights of runnin' and hidin' and crawlin' on my belly, I've thought about that cold beer. In just a minute I'm goin' over to the Desert Queen and cool my tonsils"

HASHKNIFE cussed and argued some more, but Whang McCabe just sat there and ate, grinning that taut grin. Finally Hashknife quieted. He knew that, once Whang had made up his mind, dynamite couldn't change it.

"I don't know what yore business is with Duke Talon," he said, "but whatever it is it won't work. All yuh'll get from that hombre, if yuh don't watch him, is a bullet in the back!"

"I'll watch him," Whang said curtly.

He paid for the food he had eaten, and went without hesitation onto Blackwater's shadowy street. On the plank walk, in the deeper shadows of a building, he paused, his wary eyes probing along the street in both directions.

A few horses stood at racks, and a couple of punchers clumped along the walk and went between the batwing doors of a building half a block along the street. It carried the garish sign:

DESERT QUEEN SALOON
Duke Talon, Proprietor

Not many people were in town, because of the threatening storm. And that suited Whang McCabe.

All afternoon angry thunder-heads had clogged the southern horizon, and a sultry, unnatural quiet had held the range. Now the thunder-heads had become dark cloud masses that boiled restlessly as they swept northward. Thunder rumbled, and jagged lightning slashed the tumultuous heavens. In the distance, like an onrushing freight train, Whang could hear a violent, roaring sound.

Whang's gaze shifted again, to a lighted window still farther along the street. Through the window he could see a blocky, gray-mustached figure hunched over a desk. That would be Sheriff Jim Blair.

Whang McCabe shrugged powerful shoulders, grinning faintly in the lightning's flare, and went on along the walk and between the batwings of the Desert Queen. He paused briefly, hat pulled low to shade his eyes from the lamplight. His quick, encompassing glance took in every corner of the big room.

Besides the fat, bald-headed bartender, only eight men were in the room. The two punchers who had just entered stood at the bar with beer mugs in their hands. A three-handed stud game was going on at a table, and the three others were "sweating" the game.

Whang knew all of them. Four of them, including the fat barkeep, were on Duke Talon's payroll. The others Whang had, until recently at least, considered his friends.

Whang's entrance brought instant silence to the room. They stared at him, frozen motionless, ludicrous surprise on their faces. The bartender's fat-rimmed eyes flicked to a spot under the bar.

Whang's own eyes did not miss that glance.

"Howdy, gents!" he said coolly, and went slowly to the bar. To the bartender, he said, "Beer."

With unsteady hands the barkeep drew a mug of beer and set it on the bar. Whang lifted the mug, with his left hand, standing so he could see every man in the room. One of the punchers grinned at him, and Whang felt a satisfaction inside him that was not caused by the beer.

"Where's Duke Talon?" he asked the barkeep.

"Ain't seen him all day. Likely out at the Jinglebob."

SWEAT glistened on the barkeep's gross face. He seemed nervous, swabbing furiously at the bar. Whang knew he was trying to goad himself into making a try for the sawed-off shotgun under the bar.

But the barkeep knew Whang's deadliness. He put thoughts of the shotgun aside. Finally, when he thought Whang's attention was diverted, he eased through a rear doorway. He gained a rubbish-littered alley and, wheezing loudly, headed for the sheriff's office.

Sheriff Jim Blair frowned when he saw who his visitor was. He put aside the papers he had been scanning, and looked sourly at the fat barkeep.

Mopping his face with a red bandanna, the barkeep said excitedly:

"Whang McCabe's in town, Sheriff!"

The sheriff's seamed face showed little interest.

"Yuh don't say! Where at is he?"

"Over at the Desert Queen. Soon as I got a chance, I slipped out and come over here. I figgered it was the law's job to take him."

"Yuh mean yuh didn't have the nerve to make a play with that sawed-off popgun," Blair said contemptuously. "When'd he come into town, and how?"

"Dunno how. Showed up about ten minutes ago. Better hurry, or he might line out."

"Mighty interested in Whang McCabe bein' captured, ain't yuh?"

"He's a killer. Ain't safe for a gent like that to be loose."

The sheriff got unhurriedly to his feet.

"Look, Jake," he said flatly, "I don't like yuh, and I don't like any of the crowd yuh bed down with. I do like Whang McCabe, and I think Duke Talon framed that killin' onto him. But I'll get him, because it's my duty to do it. Satisfied?"

"About the reward," Jake whined. "Looks like I ought to get half—"

"Yuh can have all of it, if any," Sheriff Blair snapped. "I wouldn't touch it. Now, get out!"

The bartender grinned slyly, waddled from the office and went hurriedly back toward the rear of the Desert Queen.

Sheriff Blair stood a moment, scowling blackly. "The locoed young fool," he muttered. "Why couldn't he stayed outa town!"

Then he buckled on his gunbelt, jammed on his hat, and went out onto the street. The boiling cloud masses were almost overhead now, and a strong wind had risen and screamed among the frame buildings. Scattered drops of rain splattered in the dust. Thunder roared like close-by cannonading, and the almost incessant lightning cast a reddish, flickering glow.

Leaning his blocky body into the wind, the sheriff went toward the Desert Queen. He pulled his gun a little forward, pushed open the doors and entered; paused, hard eyes sweeping the room.

Jake was back behind the bar, trying to act calm and unconcerned. Triumph flared in his fat-rimmed eyes as he saw Sheriff Blair enter.

THE sheriff's eyes riveted instantly on Whang McCabe at the bar. Whang was looking at the sheriff as the lawman came in. He was grinning a little, the beer mug still in his left

hand, his shoulders hunched forward. That grin didn't fool the sheriff. He saw the wariness and leashed violence in Whang's smoky blue eyes.

Sheriff Blair crossed the room, walking slowly, still watching Whang. He was between Whang and the front door. A window was at Whang's back, the rear doorway on his left. Silence had hold of the room again. Whang's expression didn't change as the sheriff came toward him.

The sheriff stopped, planted on wide-spread legs, hand on gun butt.

"Reckon I'll have to arrest yuh, McCabe," he said slowly. "Yuh aim to come peaceable?"

"Howdy, Sheriff," Whang said easily. "What yuh aimin' to arrest me for?"

"For killin' old Sam Torgat, as yuh dang well know!"

"But I didn't kill old Sam," Whang protested. "That's why I rode into town. Somebody else done that killin' and framed it onto me."

"Yuh got any proof of that?"

"No-o—but I know blasted well it's so. When Sam was killed, I was up in the hills huntin' strays. Just gimme a chance to prove—"

"Yuh had a chance, at the trial. They found yuh guilty of murder, and sentenced yuh to twenty-five years in the pen. When yuh broke outa jail, it was my duty to catch yuh and put yuh back in a cell—which I'm now doin'. Hold out yore hands and I'll put the cuffs on."

"Dang it, Sheriff, I said it wasn't me—"

"Hold out yore hands!"

Whang shrugged, and his shoulders slumped.

"If that's the way yuh feel, reckon yuh've got me," he muttered. Obediently, he thrust out his hands.

Sheriff Blair moved quickly to snap on the cuffs—but Whang McCabe moved quicker. Steel-thewed fingers gripped the sheriff's wrist and jerked upward. Whang crouched, heaved, catapulting the sheriff over his head. Sheriff Blair's blocky body smacked against the floor with a jar that shook the whole building.

Instant pandemonium gripped the room. The card players lunged to their feet, scattering cards and money. Jake, the fat bartender, ducked down under the bar and reached for the sawed-off scattergun. The two punchers yelled, and each one flung a beer mug.

The two swinging lamps over the bar smashed, plunging the room into inky darkness. A gun blazed, men yelled, boots pounded the floor.

"Get that hombre!" somebody squalled. "He's got a thousand-dollar bounty on his head!"

There was a thud, a grunt, a sound like a body hitting the floor.

Another gun roared, its red glare lighting the room briefly. There were sounds of a flailing body behind the bar. "He got me!" a voice yelled. "I—I'm dyin'!"

Gradually the tumult died. A match flared, was applied to a candle, revealing a room that was all but wrecked.

A BURLY, hook-nosed hombre, one of Duke Talon's men, was cursing and spitting blood through fist-smashed lips. Jake, the barkeep, lay on the floor behind the bar, moaning that he had been shot, his scattergun on the floor beside him. Blood was running over Jake's fat face, but he had not been shot. Near his head lay the brass spittoon that had smashed him to the floor.

The two punchers who had flung the beer mugs were looking from the hook-nosed man to the barkeep, and they were grinning.

Whang McCabe had vanished.

Sheriff Jim Blair swore luridly as he untangled himself from the wreckage of a poker table. Somebody had stepped in his face, and half the bones in his body felt as if they had been unjointed by that collision with the floor. He did not waste time search-

ing the back rooms of the Desert Queen.

He limped out, went to a livery stable and saddled a rangy dun, mounted and rode fast out of town. He had a pretty good idea which way Whang McCabe had gone. . . .

The storm struck suddenly, furiously, when Whang was a mile from Blackwater. Gusting wind squalled like monstrous cats across the prairie, before a driving torrent of rain. The night was incredibly black, except when the lightning flamed red.

Hunched against the hammering wind and rain, Whang rode slowly westward. His lean face was set in grim lines of pain. For, by an ironic twist of fate, one of those wildly fired bullets back there in the Desert Queen had slashed through his thigh just above the knee. He could feel blood running down into his boot, and fiery pain was running upward into his body.

But that could not change the cold, set determination in Whang's mind. Ten miles to the west lay Duke Talon's Jinglebob outfit. Adjoining the Jinglebob on the north was Whang's own little JLY spread.

Besides the Jinglebob, Talon owned a couple of other smaller ranches that he had gained by ruthless, dishonest tactics, and also owned the Desert Queen in Blackwater. Arrogant, ambitious, he was reaching out for more land, more power. And so he and Whang McCabe had clashed. The enmity between them was bitter and relentless.

Enraged, Talon had sworn that he would "get" Whang McCabe. And when old Sam Torgat had been killed and robbed in his ranchhouse one night, six months before, and Whang had been arrested for the crime, folks had figured that Talon had made good his boast.

Whang McCabe grimaced as he rode through the night. Wounded, miles from the hills that had afforded him sanctuary, with maybe a posse on his backtrail—maybe Talon *had* won.

By the time he had covered five miles he had begun to feel weak and sick. But he rode doggedly on. The wind and rain made weird, restless sounds in the night, and when the lightning flame twisted, gargoylish shadows raced across the prairie. Ravines boiled with muddy water, and once the buckskin fought its way across a swollen, raging creek.

He was reeling in the saddle when the Jinglebob ranch buildings loomed ahead.

He left the buckskin in a jack-pine thicket and hobbled toward the squat ranchhouse on foot. Except for a sliver of light showing at the bottom of a window, the main building was dark. Light, and sounds of boisterous revelry came from the bunkhouse fifty yards away.

CROUCHED motionless when the lightning flashed, limping forward when it was dark, Whang gained the lighted window. The window was raised slightly, and beneath the screening blind was a crack that allowed him to peer into the room.

Duke Talon was alone in the room, hunched over a shiny-topped table that held a whiskey bottle, and studying a paper in his hand. Raw-boned, powerful, with close-set muddy eyes under a splayed mass of red hair—even in repose there was a look of evil and relentless violence about the Jinglebob boss.

Fierce hate and triumph stirred inside Whang as he left the window. He leaned a moment against the wall, fighting the pain and nausea inside him, with the wind and rain beating at his hunched shoulders. Then he circled the low building, crossed the narrow front porch to a closed door. He found the door unlocked, and slipped through into a dark hallway.

Ten feet away, coming from under a second closed door, was a splash of light. Gun in hand, Whang crept toward the door. Then, suddenly, he

flung his lanky body against the door.

Unlocked, it slammed open. Whang McCabe hurtled through, regained his balance, stood on wide-spread legs, gun up-flung.

Duke Talon leaped to his feet, his dull eyes flared wide with surprise, hand stabbing toward a table drawer. Then he froze motionless, staring slack-jawed at Whang, fingers twitching nervously over the half-open drawer.

"Go ahead, Talon—touch that gun in the drawer," Whang challenged softly. "I'd like it just about as well that way!"

Talon's big hand eased away from the drawer. Cunning supplanted the startled surprise in his eyes as he looked at Whang's gaunt, bedraggled body from head to foot. He saw Whang's blood-soaked leg, the pain and weariness on his face.

"Howdy, Whang," he said smoothly. "Yuh nearly spooked me, bustin' in here like that. What's the gun for?"

"Yuh'll find out, plumb quick, if yuh make a crooked move!" Whang said.

He went forward, his wounded leg making a slithering sound on the floor, and took a silver-handled .45 Colt from the table drawer. He tossed the gun onto a fur-covered lounge across the room.

Whang backed away, putting the desk between him and Talon.

"This is the pay-off, hombre, and you'd better do like I say if yuh want to live!"

"Shore—shore! Just take it easy. Yuh're hurt."

"Shot—but don't let it worry yuh. And don't think I'm not able to take care of myself."

"Shore yuh are. But yuh don't need that gun. Put it up, and let's have a look at that leg."

"Yuh'd like that, wouldn't yuh?" Whang sneered. "That'd give yuh a chance to send me back to the pen, like yuh done with that framed murder charge."

"I don't get yuh."

"Like hogwash yuh don't! And I ain't got all night to stand here and talk. Yuh're gonna sign a confession, Talon, admittin' it was you framed that killin' onto me—or I'll blow yuh in two!"

Talon licked dry lips, a hint of terror stirring in his snake-dull eyes.

"You gone crazy? I didn't frame yuh. Mebbe somebody did, but it wasn't me. I always kinda liked yuh."

"You done it," Whang said, speaking almost gently. "You hated me, because I wouldn't knuckle under to yuh. Yuh wanted my grass and water, and yuh figgered that with me outa the way you'd get it. So yuh framed me into the pen, because that was safer than killin' me."

"Yuh got no proof—"

"That's right, I haven't. I don't need proof, to know just about what happened. But I want it in writin'. There's pencil and paper on the desk—get busy!"

DUKE TALON looked longingly toward the gun on the lounge across the room. Globules of sweat stood out on his pitted face, and above the beat of the storm his breathing was harsh and jerky.

"Look, McCabe," he said coaxingly, "yuh got me tallied wrong. We quarreled some, shore, but men have their differences. I never believed yuh killed Sam Torgat. But about midnight of the night Sam was killed, Lige Bean swore he saw yuh ride away from Sam's cabin in the moonlight. A knife yuh admitted belonged to you was found stickin' in Sam's back—"

Whang McCabe jiggled the gun muzzle impatiently.

"The knife belonged to me, all right—and Lige Bean *thought* he saw me ride away from Sam's place. The knife was stole from my bureau drawer. The gent Lige thought was me was you, or one of yore riders, who'd stole my steeldust from the corral and some of my clothes from my room. All that

was easy, 'cause it happened I was away from home all night—up in the hills chousin' strays."

Talon shrugged, spread his hands.

"Yuh just imagined all that. Why would I want to frame yuh?"

"I told yuh—to get me outa the way. Yuh found out I aimed to be up in the hills that night. And yuh made mighty shore Lige Bean would see yuh, ridin' my steeldust and wearin' my clothes, leave Sam Torgat's cabin. Then after the trial, when I broke out of jail, yuh got panicky and offered a thousand-dollar reward for my capture, dead or alive—dead for choice. Ain't that the way it all happened?"

Talon had regained some of his courage.

"If it was I'd be a fool to admit it, wouldn't I?" he sneered.

There was a bitter, desperate look on Whang's pain-drawn face.

"It's yore choice. Write—or I'll blow yuh apart!"

"That'd just get yuh in deeper. And a shot would bring my boys, pronto. Yuh wouldn't have a chance to get away. I'm callin' yore bluff, McCabe!"

Whang's lips drew into knots at the corners. His finger trembled on the trigger. Talon could see the uncertainty in his eyes.

"Put down that gun, feller," Talon said craftily. "We can fix this up. That leg needs doctorin'."

"I got no time for that. After that ruckus in Blackwater the whole country'll be lookin' for me. Sheriff Jim Blair might trail me—he might show up any minute. If that happened, my last chance would be gone."

"He couldn't track yuh in this rain," Talon argued softly.

His gaze flicked over the room. He glanced at the silver-handled gun on the lounge where Whang had tossed it, at the window, where the wind rustled an embroidered curtain. The window offered no hope—and lead from Whang's gun would cut him down before he could reach the silver-handled gun.

"No use goin' off half-cocked," he argued. "Put down that gun, and—"

"Write," Whang said doggedly, "or I'll kill yuh!"

"Wait!" There was a ragged edge to the Jinglebob killer's voice. "Yuh got to be sensible. Yuh're in a bad way. If yuh killed me, and got away from here, yuh'd never make it to the hills with that leg. Ain't that right?"

"I—mebbe it is." Whang rubbed a hand tiredly across his eyes. "What about it?"

"Why, I'll help yuh," Duke Talon said eagerly. "I'll fix that leg up, and let yuh stay here till it's well. Then yuh can ride away, if yuh want to. I'll give yuh some money, and yuh can leave the country—go to Texas, or Oregon, anywhere. I'll admit I thought yuh was a killer, but yuh've convinced me different. I won't ever rest till I find out who framed that killin' onto yuh. Then yuh could come back. How does all that sound?"

WHANG'S hands were trembling.

"I . . . Yuh're lyin', Talon!"

"Why should I lie to yuh? I want to help yuh. But yuh'll have to be reasonable, and put down that gun."

"And what if I won't do it?"

Talon shrugged big shoulders. "Then it'd be just too bad—for both of us. Mebbe yuh'd kill me, like yuh say. But you'd die, too. My boys'd tear yuh apart. This other way, we both win. Either way, I don't aim to write anything. So make up yore mind—quick!"

The gun muzzle lowered, and Whang's shoulders slumped dejectedly. Then Talon knew he had won.

"I—yuh got me, Talon," Whang said hoarsely. "I knew I couldn't make it stick, unless yuh caved quick. I'll just take yuh up on that proposition."

"That's sense," Talon said jovially. "Yuh won't regret it."

"I got no choice. I got to trust yuh to pull me outa this."

Whang dropped the gun onto the desk, and slumped into a chair.

Duke Talon lunged to his feet, swooped up the gun from the desk. He was grinning, but his voice was flat and harsh with cruelty.

"Yuh can trust me, all right—to send yuh to burn!"

Slowly, Whang McCabe's tired body grew rigid. Bitter realization seeped into his eyes.

"Talon, yuh doublecrossin' skunk!" he said harshly. "Yuh said—"

"I know what I said! Then you had the gun—now I've got it. Yuh locoed idjut—did yuh think I was fool enough to do them things I mentioned?"

Whang seemed stunned by the sudden turn of events. He slumped back in the chair, utter defeat in his eyes.

"I was a fool—I see that now. What yuh aimin' to do?"

"That's a crazy question," Talon said. "Yuh know too much for me to let yuh live. I'll put a bullet through yuh, then go get Sheriff Blair. I'll say yuh broke in here and tried to kill me, so I had to let yuh have it. That way, I'll be doin' the law a favor—and I won't have to pay out that thousand-dollar reward I offered. Slick, huh?"

"It ain't right," Whang said bitterly. "You killed Sam Torgat—"

"That was slick, too—framin' that killin' onto you," Talon taunted. "Yeah, I done that job, personal. I stole yore knife, and I stole yore hoss and rode it to Torgat's place. I knew Lige Bean would be along about midnight, so I let him see me ride away from Torgat's place."

"That's the same as a confession," Whang said slowly.

"You knowin' all that won't hurt me, 'cause yuh've got just about five seconds to live!"

Whang's shoulders were not slumped dejectedly now. The bewilderment had left his eyes, and he was grinning.

"Yuh ain't gonna do any killin', Talon, not with that gun. It's empty."

"Yuh think I'd believe that?" Talon sneered.

"Empty," Whang repeated. "That's why I dropped it there on the desk, so's yuh'd grab it. Look at it."

Duke Talon cursed, jabbed the gun at Whang, and jerked the trigger. Jerked it again, and again. Then, stunned amazement in his eyes, he looked down at the gun in his hand.

"I was right shore yuh'd done that killin' and framed it onto me," Whang said slowly. "But I had to have proof. I had to trick yuh into makin' that confession."

TALON stood with massive shoulders hunched forward, cold fury and hate blazing in his muddy eyes.

"Yuh're still loco," he snarled. "Nobody but you heard me make it—and you won't live to tell it!"

"Wrong again, Talon," Whang said calmly. "Didn't I say Sheriff Blair was trailin' me? Unless I'm mistaken he's right over there at the window, and heard every word we said!"

Talon whirled suddenly, sent his huge body hurtling like a pouncing cougar across the room, toward the silver-handled gun on the lounge. Whang lunged forward, slashed into the Jinglebob man, drove him to the floor. Agonizing pain shot through Whang's leg and spread to his whole body, as he crashed into Talon. But he flung his arms about the giant and clung grimly, fighting to keep Talon away from the gun.

Talon fought savagely, gouging, clawing, hammering at Whang's face with sledge-hammer fists.

Through the whirling mists of pain, Whang heard the crash of breaking glass. He saw the blocky figure of Sheriff Jim Blair as he came head-first into the room. Blair leaped across the room. The clubbed gun in his hand rose and fell. Duke Talon grunted, and his flailing body grew limp.

Slowly, Whang McCabe got to his feet. He was weak, sick, weary—but happy. Sounds of the storm seemed far away.

*(Concluded on page 113)*

# Red-Headed *for* TROUBLE

By

**GIBSON SCOTT FOX**

*It Wasn't Red's Fight, but He Couldn't Watch a Crooked Deal Without Taking a Hand*

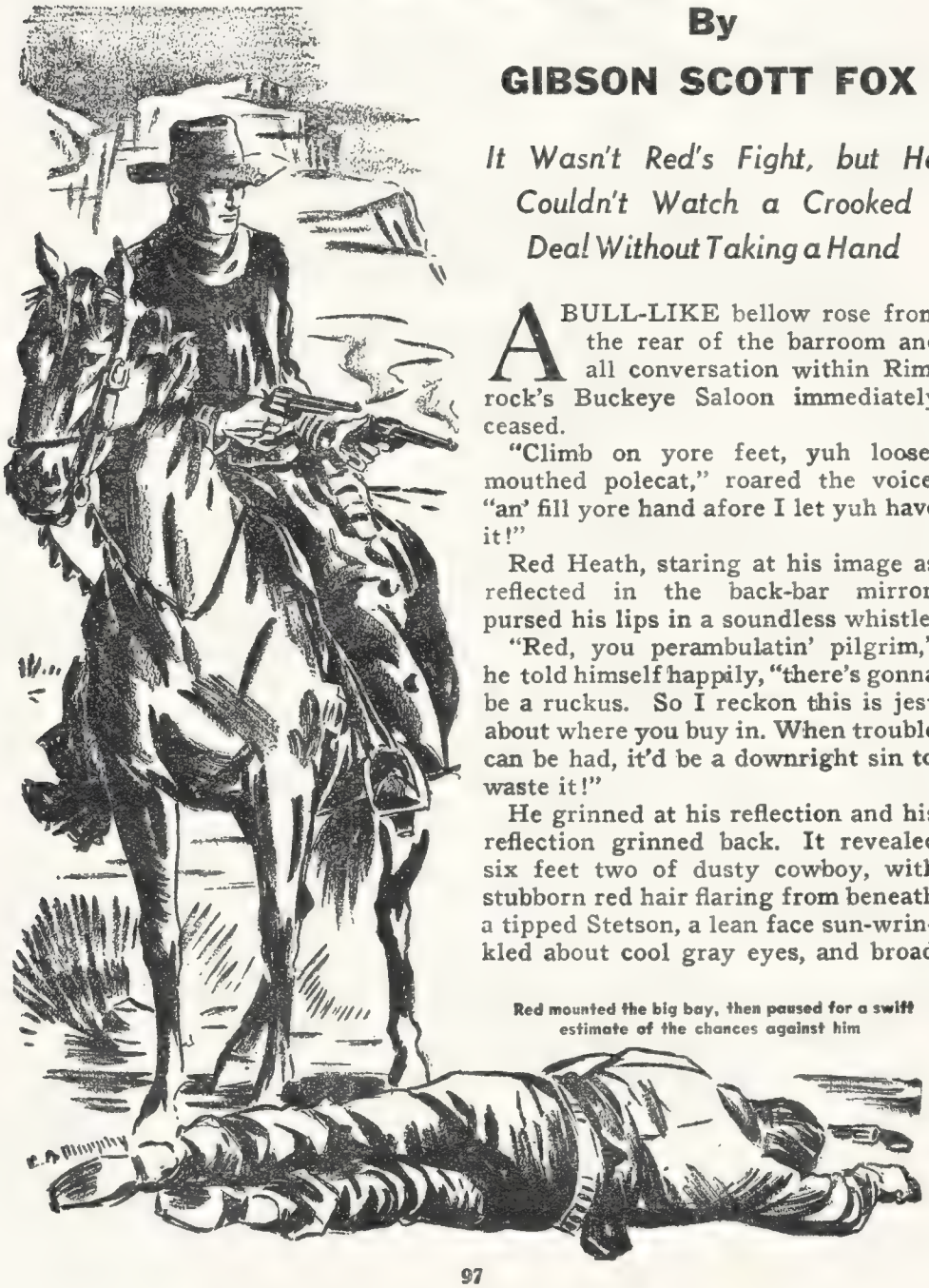
A BULL-LIKE bellow rose from the rear of the barroom and all conversation within Rimrock's Buckeye Saloon immediately ceased.

"Climb on yore feet, yuh loose-mouthed polecat," roared the voice, "an' fill yore hand afore I let yuh have it!"

Red Heath, staring at his image as reflected in the back-bar mirror, pursed his lips in a soundless whistle.

"Red, you perambulatin' pilgrim," he told himself happily, "there's gonna be a ruckus. So I reckon this is jest about where you buy in. When trouble can be had, it'd be a downright sin to waste it!"

He grinned at his reflection and his reflection grinned back. It revealed six feet two of dusty cowboy, with stubborn red hair flaring from beneath a tipped Stetson, a lean face sun-wrinkled about cool gray eyes, and broad



Red mounted the big bay, then paused for a swift estimate of the chances against him

shoulders now hunched up to accommodate elbows resting upon the Buckeye's bar.

The angry voice began again. "Baxter, either you slap leather or I'll—"

Red Heath pulled his elbows from the bar, swung about and said softly, "Or what, Mister?" while threading a path between the intervening tables on catlike feet. He ignored the saloon's dozen gaping onlookers and voiced his question again.

"Huh? Or what?"

The oldster who'd been addressed as Baxter lifted his head in instant and grateful relief. He looked like a moderately prosperous cattleman and Red would have guessed his age at approximately seventy. Seated at a whiskey-stained table, he appeared peculiarly helpless with his slight body, bowed shoulders and gentle, puzzled eyes.

But the pair who'd been baiting Baxter for the past ten minutes were a different proposition. The elder was a man of middle age, burly and stubble-cheeked. His opaque eyes had a curiously Asiatic slant. He wore two guns tied down close against his thighs.

His partner obviously looked to the older man for orders. He was thirty, perhaps a year or two more, and his thin lips were a scar across his sallow, flat-featured face.

Both men had whirled to stare at Red in blank amazement.

Red, giving them the briefest of glances, put a question to their victim: "What's wrong here, old-timer?"

Baxter shrugged his bewilderment. "Good gosh, stranger, I dunno!" He stared at the fellow with the slanted eyes. "Jug Claymont says I've been accusin' him o' bein' a cow thief." His gaze shuttled to Jug's companion. "Calico told him he heard me shootin' off my mouth. But it ain't so!" His voice quavered not from fear but age.

"I ain't been in Montana or Rimrock since I moved to Kansas. I jest came back to visit some old friends and buy a herd o' feeders. Only got in by stage an hour ago and I've been waitin' till I can hire me a rig." His eyes went back to Red Heath. "Now why would I be fool enough to pick a fight with these fellers? I never—"

Jug, his slanted eyes venomous, cut in swiftly: "You callin' Calico a liar?"

"Well, I—I—"

"Maybe he ain't," Red interrupted, grinning, "but I am!"

JUG'S mouth fell open and Calico took a quick step forward, right hand snaking to the bone-handled butt of a six-gun.

"Mister, what's yore stake in this?"

"Me? Why, I've jest been watchin', that's all," replied Red amiably. "I've been watchin' yuh since yuh first came in here. Yuh've been rawhidin' this old-timer here right from the start."

He looked the two men up and down, his grin deliberately taunting.

"An' if Baxter did call yuh a couple o' cow thieves, I'd say that was puttin' it mild. You look to me like a pair of ornery skunks that's so low yuh'd have to shinny up a cottonwood to tickle a snake's belly. You—"

Baxter's sudden intake of breath was meant to be a warning. Calico's eyes narrowed in a reflex impossible to hide, while Jug Claymont, abruptly moving sidewise, made a lightning stab for his two Colts.

Baxter jumped to his feet, kicked over his chair, lifted his voice in a shrill yell.

"Watch Jug! He'll drill yuh!"

But the cry wasn't needed, for fast as were the two gunmen he faced, Red was swifter still. Right hand flashing to his holster, his left darted out with the blurred speed of a striking copperhead to clamp itself upon Calico's gun wrist, twisting viciously.

Calico screamed, the skin of his wrist broken and bleeding, his withdrawn gun clattering to the floor.

At the same time, Red Heath triggered twice, and Jug's snarling features changed as if by magic, eyes widening, lips thinned with pain.

He stood stockstill, staring down at

his two abruptly emptied hands. One showed a furrow of scarlet where Red's first bullet had plowed its path; the other was still numb from the shock which had followed when a slug smashed away the gun it held.

Red laughed silently. This was the way he liked it. It was the threat of death that made life doubly worth living. The smell of gunpowder gave a spice to the air that—

A booming crash came from the Buckeye's bar.

Red flashed a glance in that direction and knew that now was the time to take his leave. The barkeep's uncertain aim had discharged a load of buckshot from a sawed-off shotgun harmlessly into the ceiling, but his hostile intentions were clear enough.

From the street came shouts, and closer at hand several customers as ugly in appearance as Jug and Calico were moving toward him, their hands edging toward their holsters.

Red caught Baxter's thin shoulder with his left hand, gave the old man a start for the batwing doors.

"Vamoose, old-timer! Get goin'!"

Baxter obeyed.

Red snapped a shot above the barkeep's head and followed on the heels of the elderly cattleman, the grim purpose of his gun winning them safe passage.

At the door he turned for a warning. "Any gent sticks his head outside till we're long gone, does that same at his own risk!"

Then they were moving at a lope down Rimrock's dusty main street while townspeople stared.

RED HEATH wagged his head in regret, explaining himself.

"I couldn't shoot down them hombres, old-timer, seein' as how I forced the fight. If they'd come gunnin' for me like they done you, why then it'd been different. But mebbe next time—"

Amos Baxter said earnestly, "I didn't want no bloodshed on my account. You done plenty fer me like it was."

He set down his tin cup and wiped a bead of coffee from his upper lip. They were at the camp which Red Heath, bitterly disliking cowtown hotels, had made beside Sundown Creek, just south of Rimrock. His hobbled bay gelding, Fancy Dan, grazed close by, his saddle hung from a fork in a tree and his tarp was spread upon the ground.

Red, hunkered on his haunches, drew an aimless pattern in the dust with the broken end of a twig.

"I'd kinda like to get things straight," he muttered, staring at the ground. "That was a frame-up back there in the Buckeye pure an' simple. Mebbe not so pure. Yuh real sure yuh can't think of no reason why Claymont'd want to beef yuh?"

"Not one. It's been two years since I left Rimrock. I didn't figger I'd left an enemy behind me."

"Yuh said you and him hadn't been friendly."

Baxter smiled. "But a man don't go gunnin' for yuh jest 'cause yuh don't cotton to him, does he? I told yuh nobody liked that hombre. Why, even his own uncle didn't. When Matt died last year, he left his Circle C to Mary Page."

Red looked up quickly.

"Matt?"

"Uh-huh, Matt Claymont. The Circle C's the biggest brand around here." Baxter gestured toward the northwest. "Their headquarters is about two miles the other side o' town. Mary Page who's got it now taught school an' was some kind of distant kin to Matt."

Red was interested. "Jug make much of a fuss when he didn't inherit?" he asked.

The old man shrugged. "Dunno—though I reckon so. But yuh see, Matt died since I've been gone. Only reason I knew he'd left the place to Mary was 'cause he asked me and Sime Hanford to witness his will. Then he

made us promise we wouldn't tell about it. Reckon he didn't hone fer trouble with Jug hisself."

Baxter went on thoughtfully. "If Jug was layin' fer me—an' it sure looks like he was—I reckon he must've learned I was comin' to see Mary. Before I left home, I wrote her at the Circle C that I'd be payin' a call. She and me was allus good friends."

"Yeah." Red tried to manipulate these facts in a fashion that would give him the answer to the attempt on Amos Baxter's life, but without success. He grunted briefly and stood up.

"Well, old-timer, I got a hunch that as long as it's light enough to aim a gun, you better not travel. I'll saddle up later, an' we'll visit yore friend. It's got me buffaloed, but mebbe she'll know the answer to all this. For now, though, yo're stayin' right here."

Baxter stared. "You mean yo're seein' me through on this?"

"Sure."

"But why? I ain't nothin' to you. I—"

Red grinned and shook his head. "Pardner, don't you ask me somethin' I can't answer. Jest put it down to me bein' a locoed fool. I drifted north to settle down." His grin became wry. "But I always did find it easier to locate trouble than a job. Now quit yore worryin' an' take things easy."

IT HAD been late afternoon when Red had injected himself into the ruckus at the Buckeye Saloon. Dusk came on, and after a brief period when the sun blazed furiously behind the Little Rockies, Red saddled the bay, leaving the tarp roll to be picked up later.

"Time we was gittin' on," he informed Baxter. "Climb aboard, mister. Fancy Dan'll carry double. Broke him that way."

Baxter nodded, started to mount, then suddenly caught at Dan's arm.

"What was that!"

"Huh?"

"Red, I thought I heard somethin'! From the creek bed there. Like spurs jinglin'. Or mebbe—"

The flat bark of a six-shooter cut him off sharply. Someone not yet visible in the dark yelled, "All right, boys—git 'em!" It sounded like the voice of Jug Claymont, and in the next instant there was a pandemonium of gunfire and shouts.

The bay squealed in terror, striking out with its forefeet. Bringing the animal under control, Red turned to Baxter and discovered the old man prone on the ground. He knelt, cursing, and where his hands brushed Baxter's back, they came away sticky with blood.

Baxter tried to speak, failed, and his breath rattled in his throat. For a moment, until he caught the faint beat of the old man's heart, Red thought him dead.

Then a bullet lifted Red's sombrero, and he swore again—while noting that in spite of their yells, the attackers hadn't ventured to close in. For one rash moment, however, a figure revealed itself in silhouette and Red Heath fired.

He was answered by a scream of rage and pain. Whirling, he ran to the bay and mounted, then paused with guns ready, for a swift estimate of the chances against him.

At least one thing was clear. More than the uncertain starlight explained why only that first fusillade, probably lucky, had found a target.

"A bear trap!" Red growled. "For all the racket, I'll bet there ain't but two of them, mebbe three, over there by the creek. An' they ain't comin' close enough to make sure of their aim."

He turned in the saddle and tried to penetrate the shadows in the opposite direction. On the ground, near the bay's front hoofs, Baxter stirred and moaned.

"Ten to one, there's more bushwhackers over that way, under cover. Them first hombres make the hulla-

*(Continued on page 102)*

WORLD'S LARGEST DENTAL PLATE MAKERS **Now by Mail**

# FALSE TEETH

TRANSPARENT ROOF

**On 60 Days' Trial!** from Our Laboratory Direct to You! Dental Plates made to measure—individually—by MAIL. Take own impression at home. Over 100,000 men & women wear teeth we made. $7.95 to $35 Model Photo

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE!

**SEND NO MONEY!**

FREE Impression Material, Information, Catalog, Low Prices.

UNITED STATES DENTAL CO.
1555 MILWAUKEE AVE., DEPT. 1-82, CHICAGO, ILL.

CASH IN ON SENSATIONAL NEW **TAILORING LINE**

Sensational news! Show friends complete line men's made-to-measure suits—at low prices—and pocket big CASH PROFITS on easy-payment-plan orders. Scores of rich quality fabrics, tailored-to-measure: Newest styles. Guaranteed: YOUR OWN SUITS FREE as a Bonus! No money, no experience needed: We send complete money-making sample outfit FREE and amazing FREE BONUS SUIT offer. For quick action, tell us about yourself—age, etc.

EARN BIG MONEY EASY!

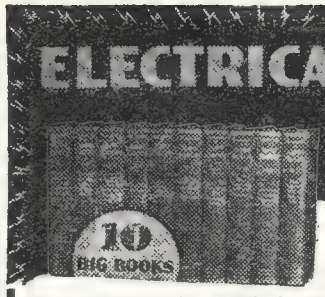
PIONEER TAILORING CO. Dept. N-1277 Chicago

# SONGWRITERS

We are offering a new and BETTER service to you. Our complete service includes revision, completion of your song, recording, radio broadcast and marketing. Send your song or song poem today for our liberal offer.

SCREENLAND RECORDERS
Box 1247C Hollywood, California

# ELECTRICAL BOOKS shipped FREE




FOR EXAMINATION
**MODERN ELECTRICITY INCLUDING RADIO AND TELEVISION**

Here's great news for anybody interested in Electricity. NEW 17th. edition of Applied Electricity brought right down to date with NEW Electrical subjects fully covered. 10 big Volumes and all shipped FREE for examination.

**For Beginners and Experts**

over 3000 pages—hundreds of illustrations—the most complete work of its kind we have ever published. Dynamos, motors, power stations. Radios, television, everything electrical explained so anyone can understand it.

## BIG FIELD! Big Demand! Big Pay!

Men who understand electricity are urgently needed in thousands of industries. Autos, airplanes, machine shops—practically every industry depends on electricity and men who know this subject make big money. Pleasant, fascinating work, easy to learn and do; learn with these books. Send coupon for a set for FREE examination and see for yourself.

SEND NOW — A year's consulting privileges with our engineers now given to all buyers of this famous Cyclopedia of Electricity.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Vocational Publishers since 1898

American Technical Society, Dept. E-149, Drexel at 58th St., Chicago
Send for 10 days' free use, 10 volume set of Applied Electricity. You also agree to send me a certificate entitling me to consulting privileges for one year. I will pay the delivery charges only on the books. If I wish I may return them in 10 days and owe you nothing, but if I keep them, I will send $2.00 after 10 days, then $3.00 a month until the total price of only $29.80 is paid.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....
Please attach letter stating age, occupation and name and address of employer and give at least one business man as reference.

# How do you KNOW you can't WRITE?

### *Earned $400 the First Year*

"So far I have written around a hundred articles, many of the stories about defense activities. Last year I made around $400, and it was the first year I really started to write. Your course is the best way to get expert instruction in professional writing."

—T. EDWARD KARLSSON.
224 East 79th St., New York, N. Y.

HAVE you ever tried? Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come when you will awaken all of a sudden to the discovery "I *am* a writer"?

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably *never will write.* Lawyers must be law clerks. Engineers must be draftsmen. We all know that, in our times, the egg does come before the chicken.

It is seldom that anyone becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

That is why the Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on journalism—continuous writing—the training that has produced so many successful authors.

### *Learn to write* by writing

NEWSPAPER Institute training is based on the New York Copy Desk Method. It starts and keeps you writing in your own home, on your own time. Week by week you receive actual assignments, just as if you were right at work on a great metropolitan daily. Your writing is *individually* corrected and constructively criticized by veteran writers. You will find that (instead of vainly trying to copy someone else's writing tricks) you are rapidly developing your own distinctive, self-flavored style—undergoing an experience that has a thrill to it and which at the same time develops in you the power to make your feelings articulate.

Many people who *should* be writing become awe-struck by fabulous stories about millionaire authors and give little thought to the $25, $50 and $100 or more that can often be earned for material that takes little time to write—stories, articles on business, hobbies, travels, sports, recipes, war work, civilian defense, etc—things that can easily be turned out in leisure hours, and often on the impulse of the moment.

Let us help you test your native abilities. Our interesting Writing Aptitude Test will do it. It's free—entirely without obligation. Send the coupon today. Newspaper Institute of America, One Park Avenue, New York. (Founded 1925)

**WAR MAKES WRITERS**

Every war has launched or marked the turning point in the careers of innumerable great authors, such as Laurence Stallings, Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, Edna Ferber, Irvin S. Cobb, Fannie Hurst. This war may be YOUR golden opportunity to express YOURSELF! Send TODAY for your N.I.A. Writing Aptitude Test. Special terms and privileges for U. S. Service Men.

**NEWSPAPER INSTITUTE OF AMERICA**
**One Park Avenue, New York**

Send me, without cost or obligation, your *Writing Aptitude Test* and further information about writing for profit.

Mrs. / Mr. / Miss .....

*Address* .....
(All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.)
94A363


Copyright 1942 Newspaper Institute of America

HANDKERCHIEF TEST PROVES VITAL ZONE
Spotless
NO MATTER HOW OFTEN YOU SMOKE IT
HESSON GUARD
MILANO $1
IT'S CUSHION SEALED
NO GOO CAN PASS HESSON GUARD
WD C
STOP
GOO
*FOR PAMPHLET "T" SHOWING HANDSOME STYLES AND SHAPES WRITE: WM. DEMUTH & CO. NEW YORK

NEXT STOP NEW YORK?

Choose the King Edward . . . conveniently located at 44th St., East of Broadway . . . in the heart of New York. Every room with private bath. Moderate priced dining room. Expert Service.

FROM $2.20 DAILY

SPECIAL LOW WEEKLY RATES
Write for FREE "Guide of New York"
H. H. Cummings, Mgr.

King Edward Hotel

CHRISTMAS SEALS

. . . . Protect Your Home from Tuberculosis

## RED-HEADED FOR TROUBLE

*(Continued from Page 100)*

baloo to stampede us. Then the others wait to pick us off like knockin' over duckpins." He smiled bleakly. "Only we ain't gonna play!"

Dismounting, he picked up Baxter and threw his limp body up behind his saddle. Then he gigged Fancy Dan with his spurs, and the spooked bay gelding bounded straight at the flashes of gunfire by the creek.

There were startled oaths and abruptly three unmounted figures loomed out of the dark. Red gathered the reins in his left hand and felt his gun buck and pitch in the other. One of the three shadowy figures vanished with a yell. Another dived for safety without firing while the third, recognizable now as Jug Claymont, shot at Red pointblank.

Red felt the bullet nip at an ear, and then they were plunging down the embankment, splashing through the creek and racing away on the far side. The shouting died out behind them while Red, scowling into the night, spurred the gelding toward the Circle C and Mary Page.

THE ranchhouse was low and sprawling, and with its two wings formed the three sides of a square. A gallery littered with gear ran across the front. Somewhere inside a lamp was burning.

Red Heath, holding the still unconscious cattleman in his arms, kicked on the door with the toe of a boot.

Light steps approached and the next moment he was staring with mouth frankly open. A young woman had answered his summons and he was certain he'd never seen anyone to compare with her.

Hair dark and glossy swept up from her forehead, and her skin held the delicate coloring of coral. She was slim and straight, and luminous brown eyes stared at Red and his burden in wonder.

Then she gave a startled exclamation. "Why, it's Amos! What—"

But Red, excusing himself brusquely, entered without pausing to explain and strode across a large hall like an ante-room to the living room beyond. He found a sofa where he deposited his burden and looked over his shoulder at the girl who'd followed.

"You Mary Page?" he asked.

"Why, yes, I—"

"Then get some hot water and cloths. Pronto. Baxter needs 'em bad!"

The girl breathed, "Yes—yes, of course!" and hurried to the rear of the house while Red returned his attention to the elderly cattleman.

Examination revealed that the wound would have been serious in itself without the further complication of Baxter's age. The bullet had entered the right side, just below the breast, caromed against the ribs and come out again close to the shoulder-blade.

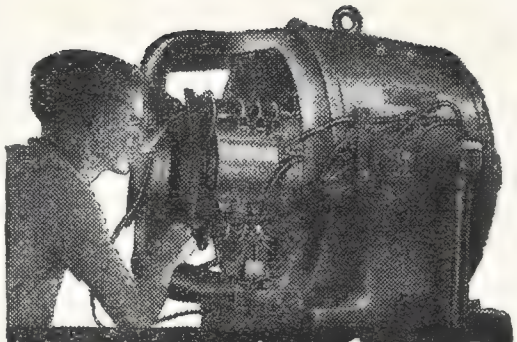
The hole where it had entered was small and puckered and bloodless; where the bullet had come out, however, the flesh was raw and torn and only now was the flow of blood beginning to lessen.

It seemed to Red that the girl was taking a needlessly long time, and he inspected the room impatiently. The windows were uncurtained, and where one had been broken, boards filled the gap.

The floor was uncarpeted. Gear littered the room as it had the gallery outside. What furniture the room contained was badly scarred. Then Red heard the girl's nearing steps and he turned to Baxter again. The cattleman breathed softly and evenly, but with no sign of returning consciousness.

The steps halted and Red put out a hand without taking his eyes from his patient. "I'll take the water." He waited a moment, became aware that

[*Turn page*]

**MEN** *whether you are* **16 or 50**

**YOU ARE VITALLY NEEDED IN OUR NATIONAL VICTORY PROGRAM**

**Trained Electrical men are needed now. It's not how young you are, or how old you are.** The question is—have you the training to hold a particular job that must be filled.

## *Learn* ELECTRICITY IN 12 WEEKS

**ON REAL MOTORS, GENERATORS, ETC.**

*I'll Finance Your Training*

Electricity is the mighty power behind our Victory Program. Trained Electrical men are needed in the armed forces and in industry. YOU are needed—whether you are in the draft or deferred. PREPARE FOR YOUR PLACE this amazingly easy way. **"Learn By Doing"** in 12 weeks. You don't need much money—**I'll finance your training.**

### "Learn-By-Doing"

Coyne training is EASY, PRACTICAL! Here you can train in 12 weeks—not by books or lessons, but **on real actual electrical machinery and apparatus. You "Learn by Doing"** on real motors, generators, switchboards, and all types of practical electrical equipment. **Get your training first**—then **pay for it in easy monthly payments after your training period is over.** If you are short of money to pay for living expenses while you are in school, we'll get you a part-time job so you can **"earn while you learn".** After you graduate, we give you LIFETIME EMPLOYMENT SERVICE.

Right now I'm including an **extra 4 weeks' Radio Course** at no extra tuition cost.

### Get the Facts

This school is 43 years old—Coyne training is tested and proven. Mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne Book and my complete story about how **I help you get the training you need for a good-pay electrical job.** This does not obligate you. No salesmen will call. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

**H. C. LEWIS, President**

**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**

**500 So. Paulina St., Dept. 13-84, Chicago, Ill.**

H. C. LEWIS, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 13-84, Chicago, Ill.

Send me your **Free Book** and **tell me about your plans to help me.**

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY STATE

# don't WORRY

ABOUT RUPTURE

Why put up with years of needless discomfort and worry? Try a Brooks Automatic Air Cushion. This marvelous appliance permits the opening to close, yet holds reducible rupture securely, comfortably—day and night. Thousands report amazing results. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or stiff springs to chafe or gouge. Made for men, women and children. Durable, cheap, **Sent on trial** to prove it. Never sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for **Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and proof of results. All correspondence confidential.**
**BROOKS COMPANY, 182-F State St., Marshall, Mich.**

**GOOD MONEY FOR YOUR SPARE TIME!**

Be our Dealer in your locality for STRONG UNION MADE WORK AND SPORT GARMENTS. No experience necessary. Easy, work. Millions of defense workers buy work uniforms. Advertising on garments big sales feature. We supply everything needed. Write immediately for FREE Outfit.
**ROBT. STRONG GARMENT CO.,**
**2330 W. Cermak Rd., Dept. A2, Chicago Ill.**

## SONG & POEM WRITERS

**NEW SONGWRITERS** in great demand. Send us your Poems. We set them to music **FREE.** Hear your song on a record. Send for **FREE** Folder today.
**CINEMA SONG CO., P.O. Box 2828, Dept. B-9, Hollywood, Calif.**

## A S T H M A

**Paroxysms Relieved**

We will send any sufferer a regular $1.25 bottle of **Lane's Treatment** by mail on FREE TRIAL. Use as directed on label and when satisfied send us $1.25. If not satisfied your report cancels charge. Address
**D. J. LANE CO. 269 Lane Building St. Marys, Kans.**

**CHANGE YOUR LUCK** **LODESTONE** **LIVE and STRONG Pair in Bag, $1**
Draw things to YOU. Get "Your Key to Power," 25¢. Lucky Numbers, 35¢. How to Read Minds, 25¢. 7 Keys to Power, $1. Incense Herb & Oil Magic, $1. Black Herman $1. Trinity Candles $1. Postage extra if C.O.D. Powders, Oils, Herbs, 50¢. Send for **FREE** Catalogue. **T. MESSICK, B217, Camden, New Jersey**

## LET THE STARS BE YOUR GUIDE!

☆

*Your Daily Horoscope for All Zodiacal Signs*

*IN*

# EVERYDAY ASTROLOGY

☆

*Now on Sale—Only* **10c** *Per Copy*


the girl hadn't stirred to obey and looked around half angrily.

"Don't you savvy that Baxter—"

He broke off, going slowly cold, then becoming suddenly furious. Instead of water and bandages, Mary Page held a carbine. Red had been crouched beside the sofa; now he straightened and glared at the girl incredulously.

"What in—"

She said fiercely, "Get out! Get out of my house!" The gun was steady in her hands and its muzzle covered both Red Heath and Amos Baxter. Her color was high and her eyes were flashing. When Red didn't reply, she stamped her foot against the floor.

"Do you think I'm bluffing? *Get out!*"

RED found his voice. "Ma'am, are you loco? Don't yuh savvy that movin' Baxter ag'in might kill him? I thought you and him was friends!" He saw her wince and he pressed his advantage. "Why shucks, ma'am, Baxter came all the way here just to visit you. He—"

But then the girl's face hardened again and Red knew that he had lost. He swore under his breath. What was wrong here? Was the old fellow some kind of poison? You'd think—

But then another thought occurred to him and he knew what he must do. He forced a mocking grin.

"Well, thanks for the hospitality, ma'am. Mebbe someday we'll have the chance to pay yuh back for yore kindness!"

"Get going!"

"Oh, sure."

He moved to the sofa with face set bitterly. He caught Baxter in his arms, crossed living room and hall, opened the door, and hooking it with a spur, pulled it shut behind him. He moved deliberately across the gallery and down the steps, but when he was beyond the light cast by the uncurtained windows, he abruptly quickened his pace.

He reached his horse, put Baxter on

the ground and caught the gelding's reins, tying them to the saddlehorn. He said softly, "Make tracks, feller!" and slapped the animal smartly across its quarters. It whinnied, reared, then headed down the trail at a startled lope. Red Heath picked up Baxter and ran silently for the barn, bulking darkly to his left.

He stood in the barn's shadow, waiting. A minute passed before a door slammed, a voice sounded and a rider flashed by, quirting viciously.

Red returned with Baxter to the ranchhouse.

He entered without knocking and was almost in the living room before Mary Page was aware of his presence. She sprang to her feet, and he saw that her eyes were red with weeping. He placed Baxter on the sofa and strode to where she stood, grasped her shoulders, shook her roughly.

"Look here, lady," he said harshly, "you git that water an' those bandages —an' this time no foolishness! You hear me? Now move!"

He didn't speak again until she'd finished her task, binding Baxter's wound, tucking in the last flap of the bandage. Then he looked at her levelly.

"Yuh're gonna answer some questions."

"Am I?"

"You are! First off, who was it made yuh pull that stuff with the

[*Turn page*]

YOU, Too,
CAN SINK U-BOATS
* BUY *
United States War Savings Bonds & Stamps



**Your Hospital and Doctor Bills Paid**

3¢ A DAY
HOSPITALIZATION
PLAN
POLICY PAYS
Hospital Expenses for Sickness up to $540.00
Hospital Expenses for Accidents up to $540.00
Doctor Expense up to $135.00
Loss of Time from Work up to $300.00
Loss of Life $1000.00
. . . And other valuable benefits

**SICKNESS or ACCIDENT**

Don't allow Hospitalization expense to ruin your life savings. Insure NOW . . . BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE! In case of unexpected sickness or accident you may go to any Hospital in the U. S. or Canada, under any Doctor's care. Your expenses will be paid in strict accordance with Policy provisions. Individual or entire family eligible (to age 70). No agent will call.

***MAIL COUPON AT ONCE!***

North American Mutual Insurance Co.
Dept. TG3-1, Wilmington, Del.

Please send me, without obligation, details about your "3¢ A Day Hospitalization Insurance Plan."

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

# Free for Asthma During Winter

IF you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma when it is cold and damp; if raw, Wintry winds make you choke as if each gasp for breath was the very last; if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe; if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a **free trial** of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered for a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address
**Frontier Asthma Co.** **38-K Frontier Bldg.**
**462 Niagara St.** **Buffalo, N. Y.**

**WILLIAM W. LORD**
**"SUPER-MIND"**
Eminent International Psychic
***His Predictions for Past Years Have Proved 95% Correct***
(Brain willed to Cornell University for post-mortem study.)
3 QUESTIONS answered upon receipt of letter in your handwriting and one dollar.
**LORD, 20-R West Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Illinois**

**PICTURE RING 48¢**

Made from Any Photo or Picture! SEND NO MONEY!
Exquisite Picture Ring—made from any photo. Sample Ring only 48c. **Send No Money!** Mail photo with paper strip for ring size. Pay postman only 48c plus postage. Hand tinted 10c extra. Photo returned. *Make money!* Show ring—take orders. Money back guarantee. Order now. **Picture Ring Co., Dept. BZ26, Cincinnati, O.**

**DICE. CARDS.**
Specialties for Magicians use. Inks, Shiners, Check-Cop, Daubs. Catalog ten cents, stamps or coin.
**HILL BROS., Box T, Salida, Colo.**

(SIDELINE Salesmen and Agents)
Sell our Illustrated Comic Booklet, and other novelties. Each booklet size 4¼ by 2¾. Ten different sample booklets sent for 50¢ or 25 assorted for $1.00. Shipped prepaid. Wholesale novelty price list sent with order only. No C.O.D. orders. Send Cash or Stamps. Print name and address.
**REPSAC SALES CO., 1 West 13th St., Dept. 4401, New York City**

**FOR YOUR SURPLUS *CASH* — UNUSED U. S. STAMPS**
Mail Order Dealers: Collectors: We buy accumulations and surplus UNUSED U. S. Postage Stamps at 90% face value for denominations ½c to 19c. 85% face value for denominations 20c to 50c. Small lots 85%. MAIL STAMPS REGISTERED. Money sent by return mail.
**GARBER SERVICE, 72 Fifth Ave., Dept. 4401, New York City**

**MEN-CASH** **EARN BIG MONEY WITH NEW LOW-PRICE TAILORING LINE**
Earn big, easy profits with new "Low-Feature-Price" line men's made-to-measure suits. Show friends, everyone, choice of nearly 100 rich fabrics, tailored-to-measure in newest styles—**At Standout Low Price** most men can afford. Only 2 sales a day can bring you $50 profit in a week! Suits Free As Extra Bonus! Write today for big, Free Sample Outfit, money-making plans and details of amazing Free Bonus Suit offer. For quick action, tells us about yourself—age, etc.
**J. C. FIELD & SON, Dept. N-1877, Harrison & Throop Sts., Chicago**

**ENTERTAINMENT ON EVERY PAGE OF**
# BEST CROSSWORD PUZZLES
**TWENTY-FIVE CENTS AT ALL STANDS**


Winchester?" He nodded toward the carbine standing in a corner. "Don't yuh reckon yuh'd better tell the truth?"

"It—it was Jug," she confessed miserably, then raised her eyes. "But how did you know?"

Red grinned. "Shucks, ma'am, anybody'd savvy you wasn't the sort to do an ornery thing like that, even if Baxter was somebody you hated, which in this case wasn't so." He frowned. "What happened?"

"He—he came in the back way while I was in the kitchen—said he'd followed you. He said if I didn't make you leave, he'd kill you both. He was watching us. I had to do it. It was the only way you'd have a chance."

RED looked puzzled. "I don't git it," he said. "He tries to beef us twice. Then when he's got us right where he wants us—"

"But if he'd shot you in front of me, I'd've been a witness. And he was certain Amos couldn't stand the trip to town."

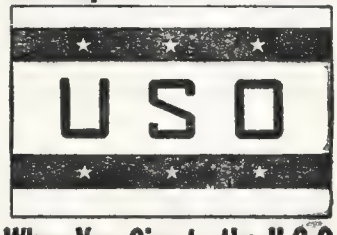
"Then he scooted out of here to make sure of us, huh?"

"Yes."

Red rubbed his cheek in slow speculation. There'd been something else. What— Then it came back to him and he shaped his words carefully.

"Ma'am, you told us to git out of *yore* house. Now that ain't so. Jug told you to say that, I reckon." He pointed to the outspread gear, the broken window, the dilapidated furniture. "We came here, because Baxter said the Circle C belonged to you. But if there ever was a female tendin'


**You Help Someone You Know**




**When You Give to the U S O**

this pigsty, it sure ain't been for quite some spell."

She looked at him, obviously surprised. "Amos told you the place was mine? But he knew it wasn't!"

"No?"

"Amos witnessed Matt's will. The ranch was left to Jug. I don't see—"

Red snapped his fingers. "Hold it!" He took a turn around the room, ideas churning through his head at a mile a minute. The answer to these events was beginning to take form, but there were still loose ends he couldn't fit with what he knew. He halted suddenly and questioned her again.

"If this ain't yore place, what yuh doin' here?"

"Why—why, Jug asked me to nurse one of his men who was ill, but—" She hesitated.

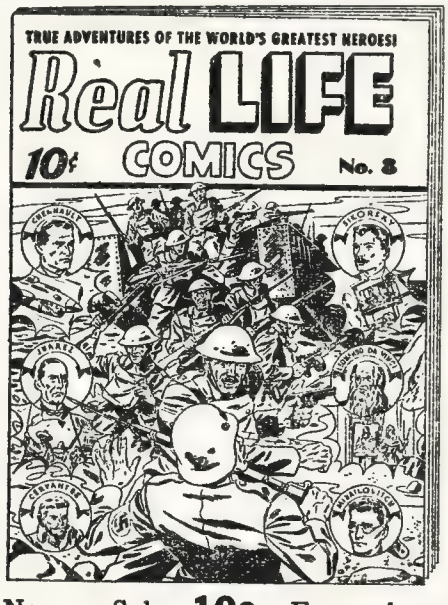
"But what?"

"Well, I don't think the man was ill. I was almost sure he wasn't when I saw him. But Jug wouldn't let me send for a doctor. And tonight—tonight the man—just disappeared!"

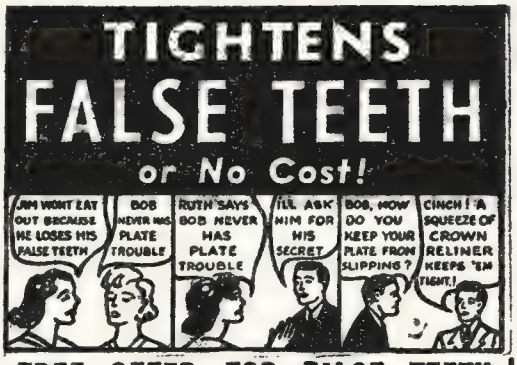
"Then one thing more. Baxter

[*Turn page*]


## Approved by Parents and Teachers




Now on Sale **10c** Everywhere

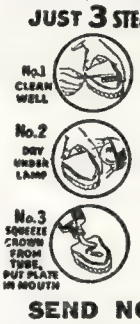

TIGHTENS
FALSE TEETH
or No Cost!
JIM WON'T EAT OUT BECAUSE HE LOSES HIS FALSE TEETH
BOB NEVER HAS PLATE TROUBLE
RUTH SAYS BOB NEVER HAS PLATE TROUBLE
I'LL ASK HIM FOR HIS SECRET
BOB, HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR PLATE FROM SLIPPING?
CINCH! A SQUEEZE OF CROWN RELINER KEEPS 'EM TIGHT!

## FREE OFFER FOR FALSE TEETH

Here's new amazing mouth comfort without risking a single cent . . . enjoy that feeling of having your own teeth again. Satisfy your desire for food . . . eat what you want. **CROWN RELINER TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH OR NO COST.**

Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply CROWN RELINER. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. **No old-fashioned heating to burn your mouth.** Just squeeze CROWN from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for CROWN RELINER to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with CROWN, take your false teeth out for cleaning without affecting the CROWN RELINER. CROWN RELINER is guaranteed . . . it's harmless. **NOT A POWDER OR PASTE! Does Not Burn or Irritate.** If not satisfied, even after 4 months, return partly used tube for full refund.

**JUST 3 STEPS**




### SEND NO MONEY

You must be one hundred per cent delighted or no cost. Try it for four months and return for full refund if not satisfied. Order at once and we'll include free with your order a tube of Crown's Dental Plate Cleaner. Rush coupon. Pay postman one dollar for combination plus postage, or send cash and we pay postage. Act now.

### READ THIS:

J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked. Now I can eat steaks, corn on the cob." Reline your plates with CROWN. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. Order a tube of CROWN RELINER today.

**CROWN PLASTICS CO.**
**Dept. 6401**
**4358 W. Philadelphia Ave.,**
**Detroit, Mich.**

Send your wonderful Crown Dental Plate Reliner and include the free Crown Dental Cleaner. I will pay postman one dollar plus postage on arrival. If I am not satisfied after four months, I may return partly used tube for full refund. (☐ I am enclosing one dollar in full payment, same guaranteed.)

Name .....

Address .....

**MAGIC PHOTO LIQUID**

*Prints Pictures on—*

CLOTH LEATHER PAPER WOOD

Amazing discovery permits you to print pictures from any of your snapshot negatives on wood, cloth, leather or paper. Like magic, your pictures will show on ties, handkerchiefs, purses, cards, letterheads. Takes only few minutes in broad daylight. Won't rub off or harm negative.

**Natural Colors, Too!** Imagine having your favorite snapshots—your sweetheart's, baby's or your own, shown in natural colors—in artistic shapes and designs on whatever material used.

**Send No Money!** Just rush your name and address for introductory outfit. Enough material to print and color 300 average size pictures, only $1.00. But don't send a penny. Pay the postman when it arrives—plus a few cents postage. You risk nothing. It's guaranteed to work. Send today.

**FOTO-COLOR, 102 W. Pearl Street, Cincinnati, Ohio**

**SONG POEMS WANTED**

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Free Examination. Send Your Poems to

J. CHAS. McNEIL, MASTER OF MUSIC

810 TF So. Alexandria Los Angeles, Calif.

**PILES**

Let us tell you of a mild, painless, low cost home treatment perfected by Dr. O. A. Johnson, for 28 years head physician of one of **America's Finest Rectal Clinics** where thousands of cases have been successfully treated. Write today for ***Free Trial Offer.*** No obligation. Address **JOHNSON RECTAL CLINIC, Desk 976, Kansas City, Missouri**

**LODESTONE** LIVE AND STRONG $1 per Pair

7 Keys to Power, $1. Postage extra if C.O.D. Charms. Powders. Oils. Herbs. Novelties, etc., described in **FREE Catalog.**

**D. SMYTHE CO. Box T, NEWARK, MO.**

**CHARM DROPS**

An enchanting perfume of irresistible allure, clinging for hours with ineffable, fascinating fragrance. Just a tiny drop is enough. Full size bottle 98¢ prepaid, or $1.32 C.O.D. Directions free. One bottle FREE if two are ordered.

Rexbell Box 124 Dept. 205 Huntington Station, N. Y.

**IF I Send YOU THIS FINE SUIT—**

**Will You Wear It and Show It to Friends?**

I need a reliable man in your town to wear a fine made-to-measure, all-wool **Demonstrating Suit**—advertise my famous Union clothing—and take orders. You can make up to $12.00 in a day. My line contains nearly 100 quality fabrics, all sensational values, guaranteed. You need no experience or money. I supply everything required FREE. Write today telling about yourself—age, etc. for FREE outfit.

**STONEFIELD, 1339 W. Harrison, Dept. N-977, Chicago**

*A Star-Spangled Feast of Comics*

**THE FIGHTING YANK**

**ONLY 10c AT ALL STANDS**


wasn't the only witness to Matt Claymont's will. There was a feller named Hanford—Sime Hanford. Where's he at?"

"Why, Sime's dead—gored by a longhorn. It was—well, it was just a month or so before Matt died."

Red gave a whoop. "Jumpin' Jehosophat! Don't yuh git it, lady? Matt *did* leave yuh the Circle C, just like Baxter said he did. But Jug found out about the will somehow an' forged another. Only three fellers knew the facts. Hanford, Matt an' Baxter. The first two was dead. The third had moved away. So Jug figgered he was safe—till that letter came, sayin' Baxter was on his way back to Montana!

"That meant he had to frame it for Baxter to die! You was tolled out here for a front, to make it look like you was livin' here—like the place was yores. I'll bet that hombre who claimed to be sick was with the bunch that jumped us at the creek. If I hadn't butted in—"

"If you hadn't butted in," said a voice from the hall, "mebbe Mary could've lived!"

Red swung around as if he'd been brought up short on a ketch-rope. Mary Page screamed, the back of one hand pressing against her mouth. Jug Claymont, fisting a gun, moved toward them grinning.

"Took you by surprise, hul.? Well, if I hadn't caught up with that hoss of yores, mebbe yore trick would've worked. But I'm right pleased. It's too bad the boys're still out combin' the country for yuh. They'd've been pleased, too. You kilt Calico back there by the creek—you know that? But I reckon you'll— Hey, blast you, git back! Git back!"

BUT Red Heath, catapulting himself forward, didn't get back. Nor was he stopped by the two bullets that slammed into his body. One burned his thigh. The other smashed his short ribs. The next instant he'd thrown himself across Jug's knees and

the man was flung backward, arms flailing out. He crashed into a table, upsetting the lamp.

For an instant the room was in almost pitch darkness. Then a slender tongue of flame licked out, nibbled at dry wood, and began slowly to climb an arched doorway.

Red yelled frantically, "Git Baxter out of here!" then scrambled forward, forcing his weight against Jud's shoulders.

He ignored the pain scoring his side and chest. It was proving as difficult to hang onto Claymont as to bulldog a Mexican buckskin. Claymont was swearing in a voice that slobbered with rage. He clutched Red to him with arms of steel, and the two men rolled over and over.

A portion of the ceiling suddenly burst into flames, and by its light, out of the corner of one eye, Red saw Mary Page half lead, half carry Baxter toward the hall.

Then Red freed himself with a violent jerk and stumbled to his feet. Jug lurched to his knees. The gun was still in his hand, and he brought it up in a short arc. Red stepped forward, and with a kick, fractured Claymont's wrist.

The gun slithered across the floor and came to a stop in a pool of flame. Sparks showered from overhead to scorch the back of Red's neck and shoulders.

Claymont, ignoring his broken wrist, dove forward and tackled the cowboy around the ankles before he could draw the gun still sheathed in his holster. Red went down with a crash. He turned in mid-air and one temple hit with sickening force against the corner of a chair.

For a moment he saw lights inside his head brighter than the flames that made the room a white-hot oven. Then those lights went out and Red felt himself sinking into a well of gyrating blackness.

It was a thin thread of fire running along the floorboards and scorching an

[*Turn page*]

**A KEY TO SHOP PRACTICE**
For Every Machinist, Toolmaker, Machine Operator, Draughtsman, Metal Worker, Mechanic or Student. Covers Shop Practice in All Branches.

**A READY REFERENCE**
Tells How to Operate and Set Up Lathes, Screw and Milling Machines, Shapers, Drill Presses and All Machine Tools.

**5 PRACTICAL BOOKS IN ONE!**
**60 FULLY ILLUSTRATED CHAPTERS**
Covering: 1—Modern Machine Shop Practice. 2—Blue Print Reading and How to Draw. 3—Calculations & Mathematics for Machinists. 4—Shop Physics. 5—How to Use Slide Rule.

**Get This Information for Yourself. Mail Coupon Today. No Obligation Unless Satisfied. ASK TO SEE IT.**

**1600** PAGES FULLY ILLUSTRATED **$4** COMPLETE • PAY ONLY $1 MO.

**THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 WEST 23rd STREET, NEW YORK**
Mail AUDELS MACHINISTS & TOOLMAKERS HANDY BOOK. Price $4 on 7 Days Free Trial. If O. K. I will remit $1 in 7 days and $1 monthly until $4 is paid. Otherwise I will return it.

Name_____
Address_____
Occupation_____
Reference_____ PAL

# FALSE TEETH

SEND NO MONEY!

Save money by ordering beautiful life-like **MARVEL** plates, by mail. Send for illustrated folder showing many styles, including popular transparent. FREE impression material sent with instructions on taking your own mouth impression. Write Today.

**AS LOW AS $7.95 PER PLATE**

**90 Days' Trial**

**MARVEL DENTAL COMPANY**
Dept. 59-J, 343 S. Dearborn St., Chicago

# SONG POEMS WANTED

to be set to music. Phonograph records made. Send your poems for our offer and FREE Rhyming Dictionary. **Vanderbilt Music Studios, Dept. E.N., Box 112, Coney Island, N. Y.**

# INVENTORS

Protect your idea with a Patent. Secure "Patent Guide" and "Record of Invention" form—free. No charge for preliminary information. Write today!

**CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN and HARVEY B. JACOBSON**
*Registered Patent Attorneys*
**38-A ADAMS BUILDING WASHINGTON, D. C.**

**Powerful Vision — 8 Mile Range**

# BINOCULARS

**20 Days Free Trial Postpaid or C.O.D. $4.75**

Scientifically ground, powerful lens that give sharp, clear vision of 110 yds. at 1000 yds. distance! Adjustable for all distances and eye widths. Binoculars come with handsome case and straps. GUARANTEED. If not satisfied after 20 days free trial money refunded. **American Binocular Co., 7759 S. Halsted, Dept. F-565, Chicago.**

**DRAW for MONEY**

**Be An ARTIST!**

Trained Artists Are Capable of Earning

**$30-$50-$75 A WEEK**

Use Your Spare Time to Prepare For a Profitable Art Career

It's interesting and pleasant to study Art the W. S. A. way. COMMERCIAL ART, ILLUSTRATING, CARTOONING—all in ONE complete course. No previous Art experience necessary—hundreds have profited by our practical home study method since 1914. Write today for information in FREE BOOK, "Art for Pleasure & Profit"—tells all about our course, service—and commercial opportunities for you in Art. State age.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART
STUDIO 661-F, 1115-15th ST., N. W.,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

HAND-COLORED in Oil
**PHOTO ENLARGEMENT**

Beautifully mounted in 7x9 white frame mat. Made from any photograph, snapshot or negative. Original returned. Send 35¢ and stamp—no other charges.

**35c**

PLUS 3c STAMP for Mailing

COLORGRAPH, Dept. TF-26
3127 Milwaukee Ave., Chicago.

**SONG POEM WRITERS**

Write today for free Booklet outlining profit sharing plan.
ALLIED MUSIC
Dept. 32, 204 E. 4th St., Cincinnati, O.

**ASTHMA**

**WRITE FOR *FREE TRIAL OFFER!***

If you suffer from Asthma, Paroxysms, from coughs, gasping, wheezing—write quick for daring FREE TRIAL OFFER of amazing relief. Inquiries from so-called "hopeless" cases especially invited. Write
NACOR, 426-M State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

**WILL YOU WEAR THIS SUIT**

**and Make up to $12 in a Day!**

Let me send you a fine union tailored-to-measure tailored suit FREE OF ONE PENNY COST. Just follow my easy plan and show the suit to your friends. Make up to $12 in a day easily. No experience—no house-to-house canvassing necessary. Send for Samples—FREE OF COST. Write today for FREE ACTUAL SAMPLES and "sure-fire" money-getting plans. For quick action, tell us about yourself—age, etc. Send no money.

H. J. Collin, PROGRESS TAILORING CO.,
Dept. N-377 500 South Throop Street Chicago, Illinois

PUZZLES OF EVERY VARIETY

in

**POPULAR CROSSWORD PUZZLES**

ONLY 10¢ AT ALL STANDS


elbow that cleared his brain. He couldn't have been out longer than a split second for when he opened his eyes again, Claymont was just clawing at his holster.

He rolled away just in time. Then he was on his feet again with Jug staggering toward him. The man's face materialized through the smoke like the features of an insane gargoyle. He was reaching ahead of him blindly.

Red summoned the last of his strength and stepped inside Jug's arms. He swung his left with a chopping motion that jarred Claymont off balance, followed it quickly with an uppercut from his boot tops.

Pain shot up his arms and he felt as if his knuckles had been mashed.

But Claymont was toppling backward just as a flaming beam from overhead broke away from the ceiling and plunged floorward with a roar.

The scream of terror that squeezed from Jug's throat echoed and reechoed in Red's ears.

WHAT happened from then on was never very clear to Red.

That he dived into those flames and dragged Claymont outside was something he didn't know until he was told about it afterward. Things didn't really clear up for him until he felt someone who must have been a doctor swab at his wounds, spread salve on his burned and blistered body.

He focused his eyes and saw Mary on one side of him on her knees. Beyond her lay Amos Baxter, conscious again, while at Red's feet stood a man with a square-hewn face, a star and a look of grave concern.

"Claymont—" Red gasped.

"Dead," said the sheriff succinctly.

"And," added the doctor, "you nearly killed yourself trying to save the worthless fool. Maybe next time you'll let rats like him get their just deserts."

Red became aware of crowd noises and lifted his brows inquiringly.

"They saw the fire from town,"

Mary Page informed him in a low voice. "It brought back Jug's crew, too. Amos and I told the sheriff the entire story so they're under arrest."

"Uh-huh," said the sheriff, "an' young feller, Baxter tells me you come north lookin' for work. Well, the Circle' C's Miss Mary's now, an' she'll have to find a foreman to hire a new crew. She kind of hoped you'd take that job. If I had a chance like that, mister—"

"Is there anythin' in the book," interrupted Red Heath, "that says a straw boss can't make a stab at keepin' company with the party that pays his wages?"

The sheriff shook his head, hiding a grin. "If there is, I shore never heard of it!"

"Why then," said Red Heath, looking at Mary Page, "if you can stand a feller that can't stay out of trouble, I'd admire to take that job."

Mary nodded, eyes shining, and beyond her Amos Baxter cackled dryly.

"How you doin', Red?" the old-timer asked.

"Doin'?" Red echoed. "For gosh sakes, fella, I'm doin' fine!"


*Read Our Companion Western Magazines*

•

THRILLING WESTERN
THRILLING RANCH STORIES
RODEO ROMANCES
EXCITING WESTERN
WEST
RANGE RIDERS WESTERN
MASKED RIDER WESTERN
TEXAS RANGERS
THE RIO KID WESTERN

•

*Now on Sale At All Stands*



**"With God All Things Are Possible!"** Are you facing difficult **Problems? Poor Health? Money Troubles? Love or Family Troubles?** Are you **Worried** about some one dear to you? Do you ever get **Lonely—Unhappy—Discouraged?** Would you like to have more **Happiness, Success** and **"Good Fortune"** in Life?

If you do have any of these **Problems,** or others like them, dear friend, then here is wonderful **NEWS—NEWS** of a remarkable **NEW WAY OF PRAYER** that is helping thousands of other men and women to glorious **NEW** happiness and joy! Whether you have always believed in **PRAYER** or not, this remarkable **NEW WAY** may bring a whole **NEW** world of happiness and joy to you—and very, very quickly, too!

So don't wait, dear friend, don't let another minute go by! If you are troubled, worried or unhappy **IN ANY WAY**—we invite you to clip this **Message** now and mail with 3¢ stamp for **FULL INFORMATION** about this remarkable **NEW WAY** of **PRAYER** that is helping so many, many others and which may just as certainly and quickly help **YOU!**

You will surely bless this day—so please don't delay! Just clip this **Message** now and mail with your name, address and 3¢ stamp to **LIFE-STUDY FELLOWSHIP, Box 3501, Noroton, Conn.** This wonderful **NEW Message of PRAYER and FAITH** will be on the way to help you by return mail!



**SONGWRITERS**

We want your song or song poem. Melodies written for songs, poems without charge. We also revise, record and market your song. We have helped others, why not you? Send your song or poem today for free examination and details.

**Hollywood Recording Studios**

**Dept. B26, Box 87, Preuss Sta., Los Angeles, Calif.**



**WANT A GOVERNMENT JOB?**

**START $1260 to $2100 YEAR**

**MEN—WOMEN**

**Postoffice Clerks-Carriers**
**Railway Postal Clerks**
**Customs Inspectors**
**Stenographers**
**Typists**
**Rural Carriers**
**Statistical Clerks**
**Many Other Jobs**

**Many Appointments Now Being Made**

**Mail Coupon TODAY SURE**

COUPON

**Franklin Institute**
**Dept. S257**
**ROCHESTER, N. Y.**

Gentlemen: Rush to me, FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay jobs. Send FREE 32-page book describing salaries, vacations, hours, work, etc. Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name .....

Address .....

# Acid Indigestion

**Relieved in 5 minutes or double your money back**

When excess stomach acid causes painful, suffocating gas, sour stomach and heartburn, doctors usually prescribe the fastest-acting medicines known for symptomatic relief—medicines like those in Bell-ans Tablets. No laxative, Bell-ans brings comfort in a jiffy or double your money back on return of bottle to us. 25¢ everywhere.

**SONG POEMS WANTED**
TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Publishers need new songs! Submit one or more of your best poems for immediate consideration. Any subject. Send poem.
PHONOGRAPH RECORDS MADE
FIVE STAR MUSIC MASTERS, 611 Beacon Bldg., Boston, Mass.

EASY WAY....
**Tints Hair JET BLACK**

This remarkable CAKE discovery, TINTZ Jet Black Shampoo, washes out dirt, loose dandruff, grease, grime and safely gives hair a real smooth JET BLACK TINT that fairly glows with life and lustre. Don't put up with faded dull, burnt, off color hair a minute longer. TINTZ Jet Black Cake works gradual . . . each shampoo leaves your hair blacker, lovelier, softer, easier to manage. No dyed look. Won't hurt permanents. Full cake 50c (8 for $1). TINTZ comes in Jet Black, light, medium and dark Brown, Titian, and Blonde. Order today! State shade wanted.

**SEND NO MONEY** Just pay postman plus postage on our positive assurance of satisfaction in 7 days or your money back. (We Pay Postage if remittance comes with order.) Don't wait—Write today to
TINTZ COMPANY, Dept. 75-M, 207 N. Michigan, Chicago
Canadian Office, Dept. 75-M, 22 College St., Toronto

**USED Correspondence Courses**

Complete home-study courses and self-instruction books, slightly used. Sold, rented, exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction Guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and 84-page illustrated bargain catalog FREE. Write today!
NELSON CO. 500 Sherman Dept. A-227 Chicago

LEARN HOW TO USE YOUR
**SECRET POWER**

DRAW things to you! Change your LUCK! Thousands have won over obstacles. Use the System that may lead to POWER, MONEY, LOVE AND SUCCESS. You get full directions for only 25¢ coin or stamps. No C.O.D.

**MARVELO**
35 W. 32nd St., Dept. TG-12, New York, N. Y.

*A Laugh on Every Page*
IN
# COO COO COMICS
*America's Funniest Magazine*

*NOW ON SALE*
**ONLY 10c AT ALL STANDS**


## THE HOME CORRAL

*(Concluded from page 12)*

How Harding fought for justice, when accused of having killed Mace Shaw's son, makes GUNS OF ROARING RIVER an exciting novelet filled with action and suspense from start to finish!

There's always something happening in the Painted Post region where Sheriff Blue Steele and his deputy, Shorty Watts, are the lawmen. Tom Gunn has written a new and unusual Painted Post yarn, HATS IN THE DUST, which appears next issue.

Shorty Watts was not expecting trouble when he engaged in the harmless pastime of trying to lasso fish in the creek. That's why the little red-headed deputy was both surprised and startled when he found himself covered by a six-gun in the hand of a man he had never seen before in his life.

When the stranger forced Shorty to hand over his prize Stetson and then the rough-looking man drew out a knife and cut an outline of his own feet into the hat, as a message to the sheriff, the deputy was completely baffled.

What happened after that brought roaring guns to Painted Post—as a secret out of Sheriff Blue Steele's past created turmoil over the range. The final result makes HATS IN THE DUST a real punch-packed yarn you're sure to enjoy.

Buffalo Billy Bates, the dauntless young scout and protégé of William F. Cody, makes another bow in the third novelet in the next issue—SCOUT FROM FORT FLINTLOCK, by Scott Carleton.

Buffalo Billy goes into action and saves the fort from an Indian attack at the daring risk of his own life! In SCOUT FROM FORT FLINTLOCK Billy is at his fighting best, and that's saying plenty!

Of course in addition to these headliners, there will be a number of short

OLD DOC TRAIL
POPULAR WESTERN
10 East 40th St., New York

Dear Doc: I'm plumb anxious t' be a member o' th' POPULAR WESTERN CLUB. Yere's whom I am:

Name .....

Address .....

State .....Age....

Occupation .....

Ambition .....

*I am enclosing a stamped self-addressed envelope. Send me a membership card.*

NOTE: If you're headin' West an' have questions for Old Doc Trail tuh answer, enclose letter with this coupon. 1-43

stories filled with the spirit and glamor of the West, and Old Doc Trail will be on hand with another interesting department, to round out a mighty fine issue.

If you haven't joined our POPULAR WESTERN CLUB as yet, why not do it now? Just get busy and fill out the handy coupon on page 112—and mail it to us! We promise to forward your membership card promptly. There are neither dues nor fees. It's just a friendly family of Western fans, giving one and all an opportunity to pop questions at Old Doc Trail. Keep sending in letters and let us know what you like and what you don't like about the magazine.

Please address all communications to The Editor, POPULAR WESTERN, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. And thanks to everybody!

—THE EDITOR.

P.S. Folks—here's a grand idea! Everybody, listen to "The Army Hour," official program of the War Department, Sundays, 3:30 to 4:30 P. M., Eastern war time. It's packed with suggestions to help you in your job of helping to win the war.

## GUNS OF THE STORM

*(Concluded from page 96)*

"Reckon that puts yuh in the clear, feller," Sheriff Blair was saying. "Lucky for you I happened to be there at that window and heard that skunk confess he'd framed yuh."

"Not exactly luck," Whang denied. "Yuh see, I knew yuh was there."

"How in thunderation'd yuh know that?"

"I heard yuh brush against the wall—and that was when I started workin' on Talon to make him confess. I knew yuh was follerin' close behind me, all the way from Blackwater. I spotted yuh several times, when the lightning flashed. Only thing, I was afraid yuh'd jump me before I could work on Talon and make him confess with you listenin' there under the window. But yuh didn't, and it worked out just like I'd figgered it would."

The sheriff swore amazedly. "Yuh mean this whole thing was a put-up job? You ridin' into town and baitin' me into trailin' yuh out here, and all?"

"That's what I mean." Whang McCabe grinned. "All except me gettin' shot there in the Desert Queen. That was a gamble I had to take. And it paid off big!"

Industry is clamoring for more draftsmen for the job can't start until plans are drawn. Buildings, airplanes, machines, guns, tanks, bridges, all start on the drafting board, so it's no wonder that every good draftsman has a fine job. Yes, more draftsmen are needed NOW. The pay is good and the opportunities for advancement great.

**Learn at Home in Spare Time**

Begin now to turn spare hours into money. Be a draftsman, the connecting link between a mechanic and an engineer. Enjoy the wonderful opportunities for promotion that exist now. No experience or artistic talent is needed. You don't have to leave your present job while learning. Use spare time.

American School, Dept. DD158, Drexel Ave. at 58 St. Chicago

Gentlemen: Send me FREE information covering special training in subjects checked below. No obligation on my part.

☐ Drafting and Design for men and women
☐ Accounting and Auditing
☐ Architecture and Building
☐ Automotive Engineering
☐ Business Management
☐ Aviation
☐ Electrical Engineering
☐ Diesel Engineering
☐ High School Course
☐ Plastics
☐ Mechanical Engineering
☐ Radio
☐ Retail Merchandising

*Name* .....

*Address* .....

**Asthma Mucus Loosened First Day**

**For Thousands of Sufferers**

Choking, gasping, wheezing spasms of Bronchial Asthma ruin sleep and energy. Ingredients in the prescription **Mendaco** quickly circulate through the blood and commonly help loosen the thick strangling mucus the first day, thus aiding nature in palliating the terrible recurring choking spasms, and in promoting freer breathing and restful sleep. **Mendaco** is not a smoke, dope, or injection. Just pleasant, tasteless palliating tablets that have helped thousands of sufferers. Iron clad guarantee—money back unless completely satisfactory. Ask your druggist for **Mendaco** today. **Only 60¢.**

**FALSE TEETH**

**60 DAYS' TRIAL SEND NO MONEY**

Now, you too, can have beautiful, lifelike false teeth made to order for you from your own mouth impression. Sent by mail! Send name and address! We'll send you FREE impression material, full directions, illustrated literature! Newest style dental plates. Money-Back Guarantee of Satisfaction. Write.

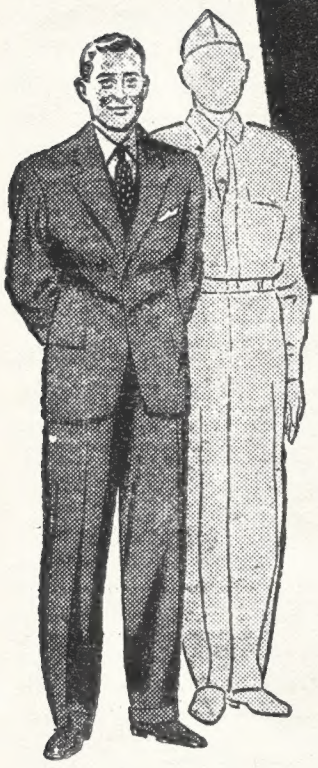
PARKER DENTAL LABORATORY
127 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 17N, Chicago, Ill.

**ANY PHOTO ENLARGED**

**Size 8 x 10 inches or smaller if desired.** Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed. **47c** **3 for $1.00**

**SEND NO MONEY** Just mail photo or snapshot (any size) and receive promptly your beautiful enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47c plus postage—or send 49c with order and we pay postage. Big **16x20-inch enlargement** sent C. O. D. 78c plus postage or send 89c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.

Standard Art Studios, 100 East Ohio St., Dept. 403-A, Chicago



# What about I.C.S. students who are drafted?

MAYBE you've learned that only with *proper training* can you hope to get ahead on your job—maybe you've often said, "Some day I'll take an I. C. S. Course, and really amount to something!"—but because of the war, you've decided to put it off. *Don't do it!*

If you're drafted, you'll be encouraged to continue your I. C. S. studies—for the U. S. Army, like business and industry, needs trained men—*and pays them well!* Furthermore, you will have real training by the time the war is won, and you'll be ready to step into a bigger, better paying job than you have now.

Figure it out for yourself—training pays in peacetime or wartime, in Army or civilian life. Mail this coupon *right now* for information on low-cost I. C. S. Courses in your line of work.

## INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

HELPING TO TRAIN AMERICANS FOR VICTORY

BOX 3967-W, SCRANTON, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

### TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Airplane Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Auto Engine Tune-up
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Aviation ☐ Aviation Mechanic
- ☐ Blueprint Reading
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Concrete Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrician
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Foundryman ☐ Heating
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Machinist ☐ Inspector
- ☐ Management of Inventions
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mine Foreman
- ☐ Navigation ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Plastics ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Public Works Engineering
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Signalman ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Shipfitting ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Telegraphy ☐ Telephony
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking ☐ Tool Design
- ☐ Welding, Gas and Electric
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

### BUSINESS COURSES

- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Cartooning ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Illustrating
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ C. P. Accounting
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Managing Men at Work
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Showcard and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Traffic Management

### HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- ☐ Advanced Dressmaking
- ☐ Foods and Cookery
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
- ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

*Name*.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

*City*.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

*Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada*
*British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England*

# Don't Look Now!

## but if you want to see a real HE-MAN BODY...

WHAT do people say when they see you on the beach? Then you show what you REALLY are—a HE-MAN or a weakling! Do girls' eyes give you the silent "ha-ha"? Or can you FEEL their admiring glances?

And don't think *clothes* can cover a flat chest, skinny arms, pipe-stem legs EITHER! People KNOW when a man's got a puny build like Caspar Milquetoast — or when his personality glows with smashing strength, rippling muscles, tireless energy! A fellow like that is BOUND to be the life of the party! Do YOU want to be that kind of a man? Then listen to THIS—

### In Just 15 Minutes a Day I'll Prove I Can Make YOU a New Man Too! *Charles Atlas*

That's what I said—*15 minutes a day!* That's all I need to PROVE—regardless of how old or young you are, or how ashamed you may be of your present physique—that I can give you a body men envy and women admire. Biceps that can dish it out, and a muscle-ridged stomach that can take it. A full, deep barrel-chest. Legs that never tire. A tough, sinewy back. An all-around physique that can laugh at ANY kind of rough going.

Today, a wave of FITNESS is surging over America! Suppose YOU are called to the colors! Will *your* body be the laughing-stock of the company or will it command the envy of your buddies! Why RIGHT NOW many soldiers and sailors *in active service* are using my methods. They know that a MAN'S body means "easier going," more fun, quicker promotion!

**Charles Atlas**
An actual untouched photo of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

### Here's PROOF Right Here!

"Feel like million dollars; have a 44" normal chest."
—L.A.S., Illinois

"My doctor thinks your course is fine. In 15 days have put 2" on my chest and ½" on my neck."
—B.L., Oregon

"My muscles are bulging. I feel like a new man. Chest measures 38", an increase of 5", my neck increased 2"."
—G.M., Ohio

"Your book opened my eyes . . . 1¼" gain on biceps and 1" more on chest in two weeks!"
—J.F., Penna.

### Would You Believe I Was Once a 97-lb. Weakling?

Yes, I *was*—a miserable 97-pound bag of skin and bones! But you'd never believe it to look at me now, would you? Through my discovery of *"Dynamic Tension"* I changed myself into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." I'm LIVING PROOF of the miracles *"Dynamic Tension"* can perform—right in the privacy of your own home! NOW—will you give my method 15 minutes a day to get the kind of HE-MAN build you have always longed to have?

### My FREE Book *"Everlasting Health and Strength"* Tells How!

Just a postage stamp will bring you your copy of my famous book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," absolutely free. No wonder nearly 2,000,000 men have sent for this big 48-page story of *"Dynamic Tension"*—illustrated with action photos of myself and some of my pupils. You'll not only read about my secret of "Dynamic Tension"—but you SEE PROOF of it! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 771, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

**CHARLES ATLAS,** Dept. 771,
**115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.**

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."*

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

# This is the time to *Write!*

Now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of their country—with frequent letters to those we know in the U. S. Services at home and afar. You'll be well repaid, too, for you'll get letters back. W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co., Fort Madison, Iowa; Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

★ ★ ★

Above: Sheaffer's *newest Lifetime* *, CREST "TRIUMPH" TUCKAWAY, for men or women, carries safely in all positions in pocket or purse, $18.75 for the set. Other Sheaffer pens, all colors, $2.75 and up.

*All *Lifetime* pens are unconditionally guaranteed for the life of the first user except against loss and willful damage—when serviced, if complete pen is returned, subject only to insurance, postage, handling charge—35c

***Listen to* SHEAFFER'S WORLD NEWS PARADE**
**with UPTON CLOSE**
***NBC Complete Network*—Sundays, 3:15 P.M. E.W.T.;**
**2:15 P.M. C.W.T.; 1:15 P.M. M.W.T.; 12:15 P.M. P.W.T.**

# SHEAFFER'S

Copyright, 1942, W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co. *Trademark Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.